

# The New Formulation

Winter - Spring 2004

Volume 2, Number 2



- Power, Subjectivity, Resistance: Three Works on Postmodern Anarchism
- Social Control, Repression, and the Role of the State: Controlling Radical Movements
- Breaking the Law: Anti-authoritarian Visions of Crime and Justice
- Appropriating "Another World"
- New Argentine Social Movements: Logic and History
- Toward an American Revolutionary Praxis
- The Revolution Will Not be Engineered: Community Planning, Rationality, and the Quest for Utopia
- Participatory Economics: A Theoretical Alternative to Capitalism
- Market Socialist Delusions of Fair and Just Markets
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- The Legacy of the Lodges: Mutual Aid and Consumer Society
- Spaces of Solidarity: Infoshops, the Suburbs, and the French Revolution
- Magonismo: An Overview
- Anarchist Approaches to Anti-Colonial Struggles: French Anarchists and the Algerian War

**Volume 2, Issue 2**  
**Winter - Spring 2004**

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Illustration taken from "Viñeta  
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The Turkish text translates as "We  
will bury you."

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## Program

Welcome to *The New Formulation: an Anti-Authoritarian Review of Books*. This biannual journal contains comparative book reviews examining the value of recent publications to the development of contemporary anarchist theory and politics.

The purpose of this journal is to help clarify the distinctness of an anarchist approach to social affairs, to provide a forum for the integration of new works and insights into the anarchist project, and to give authors struggling to redefine the tradition a setting in which to share their research and reflections.

Although the anarchist movement is currently enjoying a renewed influence on social movements and political life generally, there is a compelling need to clarify the principles, goals, and strategies that constitute the anarchist perspective. This is a precondition of the movement's ability to become genuinely revolutionary and we hope this journal, and other sympathetic projects, can help facilitate this clarification.

Contributions are welcome. All book reviews must examine the failings and virtues of books for a contemporary anarchist theory and politics. Anarchism is understood here as a doctrine seeking the abolition of capitalism, the nation-state, and hierarchy generally, and the creation of a cooperative economy, a decentralized confederation of communes or municipalities, and a culture of liberation.

Each review must treat at least two books and one must have been published in the previous two years. In some cases, reviews of works in other media (such as film) will be accepted. Reviews of two books should be between 2,500 to 3,000 words and reviews of three should be 3,500 to 4,000 words. The deadline for the next issue is May 1, 2004.

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# Power, Subjectivity, Resistance: Three Works on Postmodern Anarchism

by Michael Glavin

"If you have nothing to hide, then you have nothing to worry about," my formerly liberal father turned Fox News devotee said as if he were uttering a simple, elegant truth. "But Dad, my brother just bought me *Postmodern Anarchism* on the Internet, you don't think that will show up as a blip in some government database?" With that my father looked down at his filet mignon and asked my younger sister to pass the butter.

How did we get to this moment in U.S. history where this conversation could even take place? How can it be that "Total Information Awareness," the Computer Assisted Passenger Pre-screening System II (CAPPS II), and the Patriot Act are anything more than the fantastical writings of some hyperbolic science fiction writer? Postmodern theorists, especially Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard, have given us a critique of Western society where these programs of surveillance and control do not appear as an aberration, but rather as a logical unfolding of the Enlightenment. These theorists provide us with an understanding of power, identity, and resistance that resonates deeply with anarchism, yet, at the same time, undermines the very foundation of anarchist thought and practice.

Todd May, Saul Newman, and Lewis Call have recently examined the intersection between anarchism and poststructuralist/postmodern thought, or rather, I should say, created intersections between these discourses. Each theorist tries to show the anarchism in postmodernist discourse and also tries to draw out the implications of postmodern theory for anarchism. They each focus on a different set of theorists and draw different conclusions for the future course of anarchism. Todd May in *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* focuses on Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, and Jean-Francois Lyotard and calls for an ethical practice that would be consonant with poststructuralist anarchism. In *From Bakunin to Lacan*, Saul Newman draws primarily upon Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan and puts forth "postanarchism" which he conceives of as an anti-essentialist anarchism. Lewis Call bases his work, *Postmodern Anarchism*, on Friedrich Nietzsche, Jean Baudrillard, and the cyberpunk authors William Gibson and Bruce Sterling. Call seeks alternative political, economic, and cultural systems based on radical gift-giving, the details of

*Postmodern Anarchism*  
By Lewis Call  
Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002

*The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*  
By Todd May  
University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994

*From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power*  
By Saul Newman  
Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001

which are to be worked out by cyberpunks, "who have no need for this book."<sup>1</sup>

## *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*

I will not spend time recounting May's discussion of the failure of Marxism, because those failings are well known to anarchists, suffice it to say that May reads Marxism as being a "strategic" political philosophy in that it sees power as emanating from a single place—the economic substructure; whereas, anarchism is primarily a "tactical"

political philosophy which sees power as existing at multiple sites (e.g., the state, capitalism, the church, patriarchy). May presents an illuminating reading of anarchism by saying that a central theme of anarchism is its rejection of representation. "To the anarchists, political representation signifies the delegation of power from one group or individual to another, and with that delegation comes the risk of exploitation by the group or individual to whom power has been ceded."<sup>2</sup> Yet, he notes that anarchists do not reduce all oppression to the political realm, but rather see a network of "intertwined but irreducible oppressions."<sup>3</sup> These two central thoughts—the rejection of representation and the understanding of power as existing on multiple levels—tie anarchism to another "strategic" philosophy, that of poststructuralism, in which these concepts become more fully articulated.

Where May takes issue with classical anarchism, and I think rightly so, is its reliance on essentialism or naturalism to ground its political theory. The basic assumption of most anarchist projects, according to May, is that the individual has a good or benign essence.<sup>4</sup> State power from this perspective then is seen by anarchists as repressive of an innately good human subject and repressive of the natural tendency of society toward mutual aid, as in the case of Peter Kropotkin. Liberation is the removal of these unnatural blocks that restrict the free expression of an individual or group. Anarchism's naturalism serves as the ethical grounding for the anarchist project. It serves as the rationale for calls for human liberation; the individual or the group is to be liberated from the oppressive, external power of the state.

An anarchist critique of power is thus a critique of power over others, a critique of power as a repressive force. A traditional anarchist critique of Total Information Awareness

(T.I.A.) and the Patriot Act, therefore, would be that these programs further the concentration of power in the hands of a few individuals and authorize the type of state repression that we experienced under The Counter Intelligence Program (CoIntelPro). So what's wrong with this critique?

Foucault does not deny the brutal repression that happens to individuals or groups at the hands of the state, but for Foucault, these incidents are only part of a broader spectrum of the everyday practices of power. As May points out, suppression is one of power's "modes of enactment" but suppression does not define the whole of how power operates.<sup>5</sup> Michel Foucault and other postmodern theorists would say that this critique is founded on an outdated understanding of power. Foucault has challenged the pre-Enlightenment conception of power as emanating from the top (the monarch) and suppressing a subject below. He shows that, with the spread of Enlightenment thought, power has come to operate in a much more insidious way on what he calls a "micropolitical" level through the technology of power called discipline. May points out that discipline comes from the French word "*surveiller*" which implies both conformity and surveillance.<sup>6</sup> "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection."<sup>7</sup> The technology of disciplinary power is focused on the individual and has been

applied throughout society—prisons, schools, mental institutions, armies—to the extent that we now have what Foucault calls a "disciplinary society."<sup>8</sup> Thus, Foucault and other poststructuralist have taken the anarchist conception of power as existing on multiple levels and have extended that understanding to include practices throughout all of society.

"If you have nothing to hide, then you have nothing to worry about." What type of individual would one have to be in order to have nothing to hide? What constitutes what should be hidden? My father doesn't want to do anything that could be construed as "wrong" by a faceless FBI agent sifting through his credit card receipts; because he doesn't want to do anything that he will have to hide, or explain later, he might take a pass on buying a new book on the IRA. His own self-policing takes the place of external repression. Of course, because "what constitutes what should be hidden" is not known, self-policing becomes an unending task that invades every aspect of life: e-mail, phone conversations, library check-outs, online activity. What a traditional anarchist critique of T.I.A. misses is that the effect of T.I.A. is not so much the repression of radical groups, but rather, the construction of self-policing subjects. (The effect of jailing Sherman Austin, a Black anarchist webmaster, is that it makes people on the internet think twice about creating a website espousing their political beliefs.)

On the flip side, May points out that for Foucault, "power creates its own resistance."<sup>9</sup> My "buying a book" becomes an act of rebellion. It isn't illegal to buy a book, the form of power that is being exercised is not the power of law or suppression in a traditional sense, what is being exercised is the power of the norm. The norm sets both what is to be internalized—not doing anything that could be interpreted as "wrong"—and, more importantly, constitutes what is transgressive: buying a book on anarchism. It is observation itself that creates, in the subject, something to hide. The previously innocuous activities of daily life become split so that many practices become transgressive. T.I.A. will create its own resistance; it will create a new underground. It will foster the creation of fake identities. As activists are cut off from social movements and forced underground and the public space for social change is closed off, T.I.A. will create terrorists as transgressive subjects. To choose either horn of the dilemma is not to escape the play of power. Rather, transgression reinscribes the power of the norm. Transgression is *reactive*; the question for anarchists is how to become *proactive*?

This is a difficult question to answer because of the poststructuralist conception of subjectivity. Power does not act as an external force upon an essential pre-existent subject;



rather, power constitutes subjectivity itself. If the subject is thusly constructed, through language, myth/ritual, disciplinary practices, etc., then the individual has no essence. There is no longer anything to “liberate.” For May, poststructuralists continue the critique of representation into the realm of subjectivity and demonstrate that the subject itself, the subject of anarchist liberation, is itself a representation. It is an abstract concept that is a “stand in” for actual existing human beings. As an abstract notion, “the subject” is a product of an Enlightenment discursive practice and, as such, cannot serve as an anarchistic ground for resistance or as an object of liberation.

On what basis then can anarchists fight against domination? May goes against poststructuralist thought by arguing that ethical discourse can legitimate anarchist practice. May sets constraints on this practice by asserting that ethical principles cannot be known beforehand and that ethics cannot be grounded in anything outside of ethical discourse itself; that in the end there is either common agreement among the discussants on at least one principle or there is not. One cannot appeal to anything outside of an ethical framework to solve an ethical dispute.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, although May articulates the poststructuralist critique of essentialism, he misses their critique of universalism, so that he ends up calling for a poststructural anarchist practice of ethics that is “universal in scope.”<sup>11</sup> May fails to be able to conceive of an ethical practice that is not universal by setting up a false dichotomy between universal claims and “mere personal reactions to situations.”<sup>12</sup> This false dichotomy can only be articulated from the very standpoint that poststructuralism denies—the universal subject position.

Postmodern theorists have pointed out that claims of universalism have masked the specific interests of historically embedded subjects.<sup>13</sup> The practice of ethics also involves the play of power; moreover, it is very good at blinding its participants to that very play and lends itself to becoming a practice of domination. May himself defines ethics as “binding principles of conduct,” and as such, ethics are directly linked to coercion. Ethics on an individual level involves constraining behavior to that which is consciously valued. Foucault’s concept of “care for the self” is an example of this self-constraint/self-formation.<sup>14</sup> In groups, ethics serves as legitimation for social control. It’s a form of social control where members subscribe to principles and willingly submit to living up to those shared values. What is the point of ethics when applied to those outside of one’s value system? In this case, the primary purpose of ethics is to make domination more palatable. When you “bind” someone to “principles” you hide oppression and legitimate domination.

### From Bakunin to Lacan

The benefit of Newman’s text is his persistent questioning: how can anarchism keep from reproducing the very forms of oppression that it seeks to overcome? Since anarchism is based on Enlightenment notions of subjectivity, power, and liberation, how can we avoid furthering, in more subtle ways, the various practices that we oppose? Unfortunately, I think Newman misunderstands anarchism and misses the point of poststructuralism and thus his contribution stands as an example of how *not* to think through these questions.

Newman starts off his text by conflating power and domination. He posits that anarchists oppose power as such, not state power, the power of the church, and the economic exploitation of capitalism, but rather, simply “power.” One wonders how Newman can miss the anarchist calls for “decentralization of power” and the anarchist practices of trade unions, federations, confederations, affinity groups, collectives, syndicates, and credit unions, etc. These are clearly forms of power. Anarchists do not oppose power as such, but rather, as May pointed out, *representative* power: the exercise of power in the name of someone else. In Foucault’s terms, anarchists oppose domination defined as the codification of the power of one group or individual over another.

How can Newman take this view of power *as domination*? It is only from the perspective of an extreme individualism that all forms of power, especially social power, can be seen as equally oppressive—oppressive of the sacred individual.<sup>15</sup> Newman does well to dust off the individualist anarchist Max Stirner and bring him to the table to join in the discussion. Stirner provides Newman with a thoroughgoing critique of Enlightenment thinking. Stirner critiqued Enlightenment Humanism as a replacement of religious categories wherein “Man” has replaced “God.” For Stirner, this abstract fiction called Man oppresses and “mutilates” the individual. The abstract category of “Man” denies an individual’s uniqueness. For Stirner, there is no human essence, there is only at base a “nothingness.” It is from this nothingness, according to Stirner, that an individual can create his own identity.

The idea that an individual does not have an essence, that s/he is essentially nothing, is important for Newman because as he states: “The lack that Stirner finds at the base of identity will allow the individual to resist this modern subjectifying power.”<sup>16</sup> Newman fortifies this position by using Jacques Lacan and his concept of “lack.” For Lacan, the process of subjectification is never complete, there always is a gap between the individual and its representation as a subject.<sup>17</sup> It is this “empty space” that Newman thinks will provide a ground for resistance.<sup>18</sup>

So what's wrong with this conception? Newman valiantly tries to construct a subject who has nothingness as its center and from this nothingness can create who one wants to become—*sui generis ex nihilo*. But who is the subject that can create his own subjectivity? This conception of subjectivity is itself an historical product arising out of Western philosophic, and I might add, Enlightenment discourse. It is the very practices of socialization based on Enlightenment principles that Stirner and Newman critique that make this individual possible. What's more, Newman takes this product, "the individual," and posits him as existing prior to this socialization process, and then claims that the socialization process (which produced him) is oppressing him.

Moreover, I think that Newman misses Foucault's point about the positivity of power—that we are created as subjects from practices. This creation sets both the limits as well as *enables* us to take action. I would agree with May's reading of Foucault that "we are subjects," "we think of ourselves as subjects," "we act as subjects."<sup>19</sup> Why do we need to ground our resistance in an "empty space" when we can ground resistance in our own particularity? As anarchists, we have been constructed in opposition to the dominant values of our society. We already *are* resistant; there is no need to look elsewhere.

This is not to say though that we have *only* been constructed as anarchists. I would agree with May's reading of Deleuze and before him Nietzsche and Kropotkin, that what we call the individual is a multiplicity; the individual is the site of *multiple subject positions*. In our conflicted society, we have been constructed in many different and conflicting ways. Each subject position is a reflection of a discursive practice. However, this is not to posit a subject behind the various subject positions choosing among them, as Newman would have it. The individual *is* this multiplicity.

The sea change in my father from liberal to neo-conservative was not the result of his own construction of a new subjectivity out of nothingness. Rather, it can be seen as the overtaking of one subject position by another under particular historical circumstances; specifically, the period following 9-11. My father was and *is* both a liberal and a neo-conservative. However, his neo-conservative subject position has won this internal struggle, swayed by the events of 9-11, and has, for the moment, won the right to say "I."

## Postmodern Anarchism

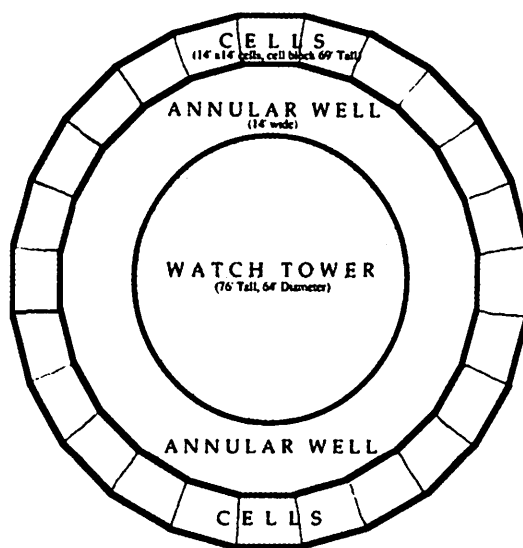
As I cracked open another crab leg, I wondered about the dilemma my discussion with my father presented. How could I, how could we as anarchists, move beyond the either/or of being either a self-policing subject or a transgressive, and thus, *reactive* subject? Luckily, I would later read the book that started the debate in the first place: *Postmodern Anarchism*. Although this work is filled with hyperbole and strange characterizations of theorists, Lewis Call, after a misstep, does help us think through at least one way in which we can become *proactive* anarchists and he puts forth an example of a proactive practice.

Based on the work of Deleuze, Call advocates a politics based on desire asserting that desire is inherently revolutionary.<sup>20</sup> However, I would agree with Newman that desire in Deleuze achieves a metaphysical quality operating functionally as a replacement to modernity's essentialism. Instead of power repressing a benign individual essence, power in this conception is repressing an inherently revolutionary desire.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, I would argue along with Foucault that desire is also a social construction. There is nothing inherently liberatory about our desires. As products of our societies we are filled with conflicting desires, many of which are bound up in domination.<sup>22</sup>

Call does admit internal conflict in his conception of self, similar to May, wherein the individual is the site of multiple subject positions. Call goes on to argue that the goal of postmodern anarchism is to "reprogram or redesign ourselves."<sup>23</sup> But Call does not tell us upon what basis. I would argue that any creation of a "new identity" is going to be based on one's already internalized identities. They will either be an extension, negation, or blending of who we already are. However, it is through the mediation of this conflict that the creation of something new can occur. I think this is how we

can become proactive at an individual level.<sup>24</sup> Call, though, denies "human intentionality" and free will. What I think he means is that there is no meta-subject, no subject behind the subject positions freely choosing between them. Agency lies in the acting out of these subject positions, but I would argue that individual freedom exists in the mediation of their conflicting tendencies through creative action.

On a societal level, Call puts forth an example of one proactive practice, one that revolves around the concept of the gift and its radical potential.





In tracing the concept of the gift starting with Mauss, moving through Bataille, and ending in Baudrillard, Call raises the struggle over the sharing of information on the internet to a potentially revolutionary status—one that falls outside of the logic of capitalism. In paraphrasing Baudrillard, Call writes, “the symbolic violence of the gift without return is the only violence which has any chance against the omnipresent semiotic codes of political economy.”<sup>25</sup> In other words, the capitalist system is based upon the logic of commodity exchange; a gift without return—as a unilateral principle—cannot be accounted for within that logic and so disrupts it.

Call takes this concept in the direction of computer discussion boards where individuals give the gift of advice; however, Call’s insight can also be taken in a more literal way—the sharing of information including software, music, and text. In the capitalist system commodity exchange is the norm (theft and piracy are transgressive) and thus the gift without return (Open Source Software) is a proactive practice that escapes capitalism’s binary logic. The Open Source movement is an articulation of the strong anti-capitalist ethic in regard to the internet, summed up by the hacker credo: information is free and should be freely available. It’s easy to see the revolutionary potential of file sharing on the internet, not just in its own right, but additionally because of the logic that it introduces. When people engage in these alternate practices, they create a different power articulation. The practice of sharing information freely, without expectation of return, runs counter to capitalist practices. This is not to say that the internet will overthrow capitalism, but rather, the internet has opened up a space where non-capitalistic practices can be played out. Call demonstrates the value in trying to further these practices.<sup>26</sup>

Call’s notion of the potential of the gift without return can also be applied to the offline world as well where the practice of gift giving without compensation already happens in scattered, fragmented ways: soup kitchens, libraries, charity groups, non-governmental aid organizations, etc. What if these practices were networked so that one could get all of their goods and services from a gift-giving network? If a woman had a baby, she wouldn’t register at a store, she would put out a call to the network and receive everything she needed: clothes, diapers, a crib, shoes, babysitters. What if such a network grew to become the dominant mode of exchange in our society?

For Call, following Baudrillard, power is less stable than indicated by Foucault’s rendering. Power exists through signs and symbols and is thus open to reinterpretation and quick reversals. All the prisons, gulags, and monitoring of citizens could not prevent the collapse of the U.S.S.R. Call notes that the collapse of the Soviet Union, which seemed as if it only

took a few minutes, demonstrates what Baudrillard says about the unstable nature of power. “Baudrillard is attempting to unmask the state’s deepest, most closely guarded secret: that its power is unreal, that the state exists only as simulation.”<sup>27</sup> Call quotes Baudrillard here: “The spectacle of those regimes imploding with such ease ought to make Western governments—or what is left of them—tremble, for they have barely any more existence than the Eastern ones.”<sup>28</sup> If anarchists could cultivate practices that move beyond the norm/transgression dichotomy, so that they circulated as common currency throughout society, there is the potential that one day Western governments will disappear as quickly as their counterparts did in the East despite “Total Information Awareness.”

## Conclusion

If we accept the postmodern worldview, we are at the same time humbled and empowered. Postmodern theory takes the anarchist insight that we cannot speak for others and furthers it to include even speaking under the guise of “universal emancipation” or an ethics “universal in scope,” no matter how well intended. In doing so, we must give up our ethical grounding. Our principles are not “objectively true;” they are our values. They are that which defines us as a group, or as an individual. They come from our culture and our particular historical location. This is a conception of ethics without grounding and without universal claim. This however does not negate the principles of anarchism but rather limits their implementation and leaves them open for debate and modification. Our principles would then not be a ground, but a beacon that enables us to decide the best course of future action.

One of the most important lessons to be learned from Foucault is that since all practices involve power, the practice of anarchism must admit that it is also a power formulation. Anarchists need to get over the self-delusion, in which Newman participates, that anarchists “oppose power.” Anarchism is based upon its own exclusions; e.g., participatory democracy is a form of political organization in which the individual participant is beholden to the will of the majority. Participatory democracy offers the most opportunity for all of its members to directly affect the decision making process, but it is still a practice of power. Anarchists need to focus on creating new power formulations that reflect our principles. The practice of the gift without return is one such practice, but others are awaiting discovery or creation.

Poststructuralists have also shown that what anarchism takes to be inherent in all human beings is a fabrication of Enlightenment discourse. Postmodern theory puts forth a conception of the individual as the site of a multiplicity of subject positions in conflict with one another. It is through

mediation of this conflict in creative action that we can escape the dilemma of being either a self-policing or a transgressive subject and become proactive anarchists.

As my conversation with my father spanned the history of U.S. foreign policy since WWII—the Vietnam war, Iran-Contra, the death squads in El Salvador—I could not help but think about my sister who was sitting there absorbing every word. She has entered a world where, on the one hand, she expects to freely give and receive information through the internet, and on the other, these practices are becoming criminalized and her private information will be freely available to the state and corporations. There is a struggle going on now to determine who will control the digital representation of who she is. How these conflicting logics play themselves out through her future practices, and the practices of her generation, will determine to a large extent the society that is to come.

## Endnotes

1. Lewis Call, *Postmodern Anarchism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002), 139.
2. Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 47.
3. *Ibid.*, 54.
4. *Ibid.*, 63.
5. *Ibid.*, 68.
6. *Ibid.*, 102.
7. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 202-203.
8. *Ibid.*, 216.
9. *Ibid.*, 73.
10. Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 154.
11. *Ibid.*, 119.
12. *Ibid.*, 119.
13. Friedrich Nietzsche in *Genealogy of Morals* exposes many universal claims of morality as being rooted in the particular interests of those initially espousing them.
14. Foucault discusses his conception of “care for the self” at length in: “On the Genealogy of Ethics” in Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 340-372.
15. Saul Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-Authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001), 59.
16. *Ibid.*, 60.
17. *Ibid.*, 138.
18. *Ibid.*, 153.
19. Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism*, 79.
20. Call, *Postmodern Anarchism*, 124.
21. Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan*, 109.
22. Call admits as much when he pleads, “kill our inner fascist” (*Postmodern Anarchism*, 53). But he cannot tell us why because to answer that question would lead us away from desire as a simple revolutionary force and straight back to the realm of ethics.
23. *Ibid.*, 52.
24. *Ibid.*, 131.
25. *Ibid.*, 97.
26. Whether or not the people involved in struggles in cyberspace call themselves anarchists is less relevant than the fact that they are organizing in anarchistic ways and acting according to anarchist principles. Recently at a hackers convention in New York, H2K2, Jello Biafra was the keynote speaker and many of the workshops concerned anti-authoritarian themes: The New FBI and How It Can Hurt You, “I Am Against Intellectual Property,” Face Scanning Systems at Airports, The Patriot Act. This is fertile ground for anarchist organizing not because these individuals would be open to anarchist ideas, but because they are already practicing anarchism. The combination of off-line anarchist organizers and anarchistic cyber-activists could be a very potent force.
27. Lewis Call, *Postmodern Anarchism*, 109-110.
28. *Ibid.*, 110.

# The New Formulation

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# Social Control, Repression, and the Role of the State: Controlling Radical Movements

by Luis Fernandez

For years, the state has used various forms of social control to attack radical social movements that challenge its power. The three works reviewed here explore the power mechanisms behind the repression and pacification of political dissent. They help us understand the various ways that the state intervenes to suppress radical movements and prevent social transformation.

In order to make more sense of social control, repression, and the role that the state plays in it, it is useful to make at least two distinctions between modes of social control. The first mode can be thought of as “hard-line” social control, which includes the “hard” tactics used by such groups as the FBI to directly undermine and abolish radical movements. The first two works reviewed here, Christian Parenti’s *Talking Liberties: Prison, Policing, and Surveillance in an Age of Crisis* and Ward Churchill’s *In a Pig’s Eye: Reflections on the Police State, Repression and Native America*, examine this kind of social control. Both selections are recorded lectures distributed by AK Press in CD format.

The second mode of social control is not generally discussed within the anti-authoritarian literature. The “soft-line” mode of social control includes less direct modes of oppression, such as the control of dissent through the legal regulation of physical space. Stanley Cohen’s *Visions of Social Control* attempts to understand how “soft-line” social control is an equally effective tool of the state for maintaining control. As anti-authoritarians, we need to start thinking about “soft-line” social control and the effects that it has on our movements, since both “soft-” and “hard-line” modes tend to work in unison.

## *Taking Liberties*

Christian Parenti, the son of the Marxist scholar Michael Parenti, focuses his work on the study of repression and state power in the United States. He is the author of *Lockdown America*<sup>1</sup> and his writings appear in magazines such as *The Nation* and *Monthly Review*. Parenti’s latest work, entitled *Taking Liberties: Prison, Policing and Surveillance in the age of Crisis*, is a CD recording compiled from lectures delivered in April 2000, October 2001, and December 2001. The CD focuses on three broad issues. First, it presents an explanation of the function of poverty in a capitalist society. Second, it

*Talking Liberties: Prison, Policing, and Surveillance in an Age of Crisis*

By Christian Parenti  
Oakland: AK Press, 2002

*In a Pig’s Eye: Reflections on the Police State, Repression, and Native America*

By Ward Churchill  
Oakland: AK Press, 2002

*Visions of Social Control: Crime, Punishment, and Classification*

By Stanley Cohen  
Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985

delves briefly into political surveillance, focusing on the powers of the FBI prior to and after the USA Patriot Act. Finally, it contains a long, detailed discussion of the intricacies of the rise of political Islam.

Parenti starts by noting a paradox within the capitalist system. “Capitalism needs poverty,”<sup>2</sup> states Parenti unequivocally, arguing that without enough poor people around workers start demanding better conditions and higher wages. However, at the same time, capitalism is

threatened by too much poverty. Poverty, he argues, tends to breed dissatisfaction, which makes revolt more likely. The question is “How do you have poverty and manage the threat of poverty?”<sup>3</sup> The answer, for Parenti, is by expanding social control mechanisms through the criminal justice system. The buildup of prisons and policing in the last two decades is not a result, as some might have it, of corporations expanding into the criminal justice system for profits.<sup>4</sup> Rather, the growth comes from an increasing need by the capitalist class (in collusion with the state) for greater social control, a growth necessary to keep the poor from revolting. Prisons, mandatory sentencing, and the “war on drugs” become the means by which the state is able to subdue the working class and keep poverty at a level that maximizes profits while minimizing dissent. Here we see a clear example of “hard-line” social control.

Parenti also describes a second, softer tactic of social control, mainly co-optation. He briefly describes the way that workers’ movements in the 1960s were co-opted by turning their leaders into administrators of low income housing and social services. This co-optation happened at a time when the United States was economically strong enough to absorb the poor in order to legitimize the system. However, the economic crisis in the 1970s put an end to this tactic and brought with it the harder modes of social control. Parenti concludes that, “In a class society, rule comes down to two things, as Machiavelli said. The prince has two choices. He can either treat men [sic] well or crush them. . . . Sometimes economic conditions are plush enough that people can be treated well, but more often than not, in a capitalist society, the ruling class, through the state, must crush and intimidate people to reproduce their system. And that is what the criminal justice system is all about.”<sup>5</sup>

The CD also contains several tracks devoted to the issue of political surveillance as a means of social control. One of the tools that the state has for suppressing dissent and reducing the impact of radical movements are the powers granted to the FBI for the purpose of surveillance.

Analyzing the powers granted to federal agencies before and after September 11th, Parenti makes the argument that the changes in the USA Patriot Act are not as serious as they might seem. However, this is not because the FBI has little power over political dissidents, but because the organization already had all the repressive power it needed prior to the adoption of the act. The FBI has always been well funded, with over "30 billion dollars devoted every year to intelligence gathering,"<sup>6</sup> even before the Patriot Act. They also had plenty of power to search premises, to tap telephones, and look over e-mails. If they wanted to search your home or tap your telephone, they could do so by getting a Title 3 warrant. If this warrant was too difficult to acquire, which often it was, then they could use the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) to acquire the needed search warrant. In the history of the FBI only one FISA warrant was ever denied. Parenti's point is that the FBI had plenty of funding and full powers of observation prior to September 11, 2001. The USA Patriot Act only solidified existing powers.

According to Parenti, the main change resulting from the USA Patriot Act is that "it merges FISA and Title 3 warrants, even when intelligence is not the primary reason . . . In other words, they get carte blanche. But in a way that is what they were already doing."<sup>7</sup> The Patriot Act also allows for "judge shopping," which gives the FBI the ability to seek a FISA or Title 3 warrant in any jurisdiction and apply it to any other jurisdiction. "Judge shopping" means that the FBI can now use a conservative judge to give them the power of surveillance anywhere in the United States, thus successfully getting around any civil libertarian judge that might want to protect civil liberties.

The last section of the CD lectures shift sharply away from issues of suppression and surveillance. In this section, Parenti provides a detailed (and sometimes tedious) description of the rise of political Islam, arguing that to understand it one has to study capitalism, modernity, and the state. According to Parenti, political Islam develops in response to colonialism and capitalism. However, he presents this movement as deeply embedded in the modernist project, seeking the state as its final prize through the means of a vanguard-like party organization. Even though slow going, I would recommend this section to anybody needing an introduction to the political landscape of Islamic politics and the role that the CIA played there.

With *Taking Liberties*, Parenti gives important political information on recent changes to the powers of the FBI, presented in an accessible format. This CD lecture could easily be used for teach-ins and classroom education as a quick way to expose people to radical ideas. However, the more seasoned radical will discover little new information not already found in other works by Parenti. Finally, some of the information contained in the lectures is quickly becoming dated. The current political mood in the United States is changing so quickly that some issues that were topical in 2000 and 2001 have been superseded by newer developments, such as the War on Iraq. Nonetheless, the lectures contain important reminders of the continuing increase of the state's "hard-line" powers.

### *In a Pig's Eye*

Ward Churchill has spent a lifetime studying political repression in the United States, uncovering and documenting the bloody legacy of the FBI in suppressing radical movements. He is a professor of Ethnic Studies at the University of Colorado and the author of numerous books, including *Agents of Repression* and *A Little Matter of Genocide*.<sup>8</sup> AK Press recently released a two CD set of Ward Churchill's lectures recorded in May 2001. The release is entitled *In a Pig's Eye: Reflections on the Police State, Repression and Native America*<sup>9</sup> and contains almost two hours of dialogue.

The primary purpose of the lecture is to explain and contextualize the firefight that occurred at Oglala Village, on the Pine Ridge reservation in 1975, where two FBI agents were killed, resulting in the controversial imprisonment of Leonard Peltier. Churchill argues that in order to understand this incident, and the symbolism of Leonard Peltier, one needs to "understand two lines of history that feed into that particular event."<sup>10</sup> The two lines are the history of the Native Peoples' struggle and the history of the FBI. It is only by looking at these two long trajectories, he argues, that we can fully comprehend Peltier's arrest and what it means. Churchill devotes the entire two CD lectures to the examination of the two historical lines.

Churchill starts by describing the historical context of the native people's struggle, particularly focusing on the American Indian Movement (AIM). To Churchill, Peltier is a prisoner of war, "a prisoner of the longest on-going war in this hemisphere."<sup>11</sup> He reminds us that in 500 years the native people were reduced in population by ninety-seven percent. Their land assets, if recognized as property prior to the arrival of Columbus, were also reduced by approximately ninety-eight percent. But even with this genocide and mass expropriation, the two million or so Native Americans alive today still own fifty millions acre of land. This land, Churchill argues, is some of the richest land in natural resources, with



two-thirds of the US domestic uranium reserve, twenty-five percent of coal, and twenty-five percent of oil and gas. Yet, Indians on the aggregate are the poorest people on the continent. Life expectancy for an Indian male is fifty-four years, and fifty-seven for females. Infant mortality is fourteen times higher than the national average. The unemployment rate on the Pine Ridge reservation has been a calamitous ninety-two percent for the last fifty years. How can we explain the catastrophic discrepancies between resources and Indian wealth? For Churchill, the answer lies in the US Government and their self-proclaimed trustee and fiduciary responsibility over Indian land, which it uses to extract wealth while leaving behind a devastated population. It is this devastation and colonial oppression that frames the uprising at Pine Ridge, Peltier's imprisonment, and the American Indian Movement.

The context of the insurgency of 1975, then, is poverty, subordination, and the extraction of resources. This was the nature of the set of circumstances that were confronted by the American Indian Movement at the Pine Ridge Reservation. What happened at Pine Ridge was an "assertion of the rights to sovereign control over lands, lives, and destiny"<sup>12</sup> that is an inherent right of American Indian people. And it was this assertion of rights that brought the repression of the American Indian Movement by the FBI.

Churchill explores the second line by tracing the history of the FBI as a repressive tool of a police state for the control of radical movements. The myth, according to Churchill, is that the FBI is an investigative agency having to do with the unbiased application of the rule of law. In reality, the FBI is an institution set up, from the start, as a political police force at the national level to preserve the interests of the capitalist class by maintaining the status quo. Using a similar argument found in Parenti's CD lecture, Churchill describes the function of the FBI as a tool for "hard-line" social control, that is, a form of state control that "neutralizes" political dissidents by any means necessary, including violence, repression, and assassination.

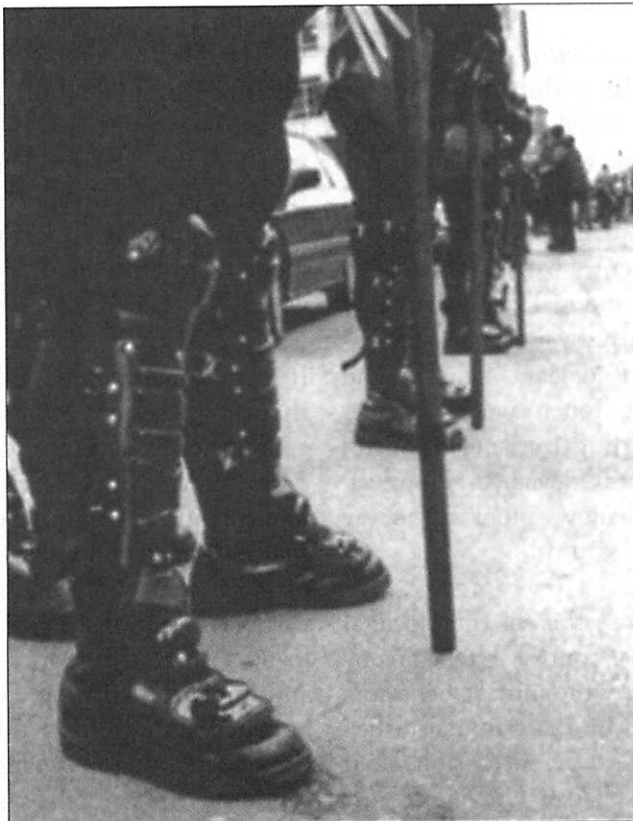
Churchill places the origins of the police state not with the founding of the FBI in 1913, but in 1852 with the creation of the

Pinkerton Detective Agency. The Pinkerton Detective Agency was a private investigative organization hired by both the federal government and the leaders of private industry to investigate labor dissent. It is here that Churchill finds the first connection between industry and government, and all the necessary ingredients that ultimately lead to the establishment of the FBI.

It is in the Pinkerton Agency that we see the future tactics adopted by the FBI. A poignant example, which sheds light on the current FBI practices around the "War on Terrorism," comes when Churchill describes the way that the Pinkerton Agency provided security for Abraham Lincoln. According to Churchill, the Pinkerton Agency manufactured an assassination attempt on the president, then pretended to prevent it, thus proving how effective the organization was. This is a technique used by the FBI today that Churchill describes as the "manufacturing of a total hallucination, spinning it so that it sounds scary, no matter how impossible, and then preventing this fiction from occurring and proving, therefore, that you are a barrier against devastation, protecting the well-being of the population, demonizing opponents and gaining license to naturalize them."<sup>13</sup>

Between the creation of the FBI in 1913 and its attack on the American Indian Movement in the 1970s, there is an extensive history of oppressive campaigns on political dissidents that looks eerily familiar to recent FBI activity around the "War on Terrorism." For example, shortly after World War I, the FBI undertook the Palmer Raids. The Palmer Raids was the roll up of the Anarchist and Anarcho-syndicalist movement, where 15,000 people were arrested overnight primarily because they were recent immigrants to the United States. Each person was questioned regarding subscriptions to radical magazines or their involvement in radical organizations, resulting in mass deportation to Russia without a hearing.

Churchill discusses several other examples of movement suppression, such as the attack on the International Workers of the World, The United Negro Improvement Association, the Communist Party, and the Black



Panthers. He details the various tactics developed and used by the FBI, including discrediting movement leaders, infiltration, agent provocateurs, manufacturing legal evidence, and assassination. By the time the American Indian Movement arrives at the scene in 1970, the FBI had fully developed methods of suppression, which it wasted no time in using.

What happened at Pine Ridge, then, is the result of the struggle between people asserting their autonomy and an organization that had sixty years of experience in social control. "The most intensive of all these operations that were carried out [by the FBI] was against the American Indian Movement" asserts Churchill, "because [the FBI] had benefited, ultimately, from all the experience it had obtained . . ." <sup>14</sup> In the end, Churchill describes the imprisonment of Leonard Peltier, and the sixty-nine deaths of Indians on the Pine Ridge reservation in the expanse of two years, as the arbitrary ability of the federal government to repress the legitimate aspirations of liberation within its boundaries. "And in so far that they can repress us, they can repress you," <sup>15</sup> concludes Churchill.

### *Vision of Social Control*

Stanley Cohen is a professor at the London School of Economics, where he teaches courses in crime and deviance. <sup>16</sup> Cohen is a renown scholar who has written about social control for over thirty years. While Cohen is primarily an academic writer, his works provide insight into how social control might work and how it might be challenged.

Cohen's classic book, *Visions of Social Control*, focuses on the history of social control movements within the state. He describes the changing nature of social control in "post-industrial" society and the "organized ways in which society responds to behavior and people it regards as deviant, problematic, worrying, threatening, troublesome or undesirable in some way or another," <sup>17</sup> with "planned and programmed responses to expected and realized deviance." <sup>18</sup> He centers his analysis on the various ways that the state has evolved as it deals with the control of "deviant" behavior and people. Unlike Parenti and Churchill, Cohen's work is broader in nature, only peripherally including the social control mechanism applied directly to political "deviance." However, his focus on the use of social control allows a look at the way the state uses "soft-line" methods to control.

In the first chapter, Cohen describes the shifting societal strategies and beliefs regarding social control. He begins by focusing on criminal justice, then traces the shifting behaviors of concern, the strategies employed by the criminal justice system (i.e., the state), and the quite different "visions" and interpretations of the nature of such change. Cohen presents

a master narrative regarding the development of social control, explaining how it develops and the ideologies behind each change.

If you are familiar with Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, <sup>19</sup> then the outlines of Cohen's argument will sound familiar: the optimism born from the Enlightenment led to the construction of prison and mental asylums, each designed to "correct" deviant behavior. Then, a criminal justice system develops through the aid of professional discourses such as psychoanalysis; traditional notions of punishment which focused on inflicting pain on the body were replaced by moralistic theories of punishment focusing on treatment and the study of criminal behavior. The key to the analysis is that, in the end, the forms of social control expanded and became more prevalent throughout society, even through numerous reformists attempts to dismantle various state apparatus of control, such as prisons. The state appears to have an amazing ability to incorporate and co-opt reformist approaches that attempt to challenge the core of state power. It is this ability that Cohen finds curious.

Cohen argues that there is a struggle between what he identifies as the "exclusion" and "inclusion" modes of social control. By "exclusion" he means a system of social control that was dominant in the 19th century, where deviants are excluded or separated in order to protect society. "Exclusion," as a mode of social control, includes practices of segregation, expulsion, classification, and stigmatization. They are practices that leave the "deviant" person or group isolated from the larger society. Examples of this "hard-line" mode of social control abound. The Red Scare (and the Palmer Raids described by Churchill) are perfect examples of the state identifying political "deviants" and excluding them by expelling them from the country. A more recent example is the case of the Arab-Americans abducted by the Bush administration as a measure of "national security." It is this mode that both Parenti and Churchill describe well in their works.

If "exclusionary" modes of control represent the "hard" side, then methods of "inclusion" are characterized by "soft" approaches to deviance. Cohen describes "inclusion" as the desire to deal with offenders and deviants in the community, to dismantle state apparatus, to decentralize, and to root the solutions in a community-based approach. Under this mode of social control, "deviants are retained, as long as possible within conventional social boundaries and institutions, there to be absorbed." <sup>20</sup> Cohen argues that as reformers created and implemented programs designed to replace the "hard" approaches (such as imprisonment), the unintended consequence was an expansion of the social control "net" that captures people into the system, while leaving the larger more

coercive system in place. The ultimate paradox, according to Cohen, is that soft interventions (or reformist practices) tend to expand social control into areas that were otherwise free from state intervention; they supplement rather than replace the old institutions of control. As a result, the boundaries of the system are less visible, but more intrusive. The state grows its tentacles into new spheres.

Cohen's book is a little convoluted, somewhat academic, and written mostly for individuals familiar with the criminological literature. The lay person may find some of the arguments unclear, which is why I would not recommend this book. However, the important point to draw from the book is that, for Cohen, "hard-line" approaches to social control may not be the only (or even the primary) way of controlling populations. In contrast to Parenti and Churchill, Cohen states that "Telephone tapping, agents provocateurs, censorship of political writings, interference with academic freedom are not, after all, part of the everyday experience and concerns of the vast bulk of the population."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, he argues, populations are controlled not only through "hard-line" tactics, but also through less menacing strategies that were once developed by reformists to challenge state power.

## Conclusion

There are a number of lessons that anti-authoritarians can draw from the works reviewed here. First, as Parenti reminds us, it is important to keep the changes brought by the USA Patriot Act in context. That is, while the powers of the state grows, we must remember that the state already has plenty of repressive power, a fact the Churchill makes poignantly clear in his retelling of the history of the FBI. Second, we need to be aware of the history of repression of radical movements as we build our own. The more informed we become of past assaults, the more we are likely to defend ourselves and fellow radicals. As Parenti makes clear, the only reason the state does not deploy even more repressive tactics is because we will not let them. It is up to the people to stop them.

Third, we must be vigilant of the soft-line mode of social control. While there is no denying that "hard" modes of social control were and are used to repress social movements, there is increasing evidence that softer modes are being developed, modes that are harder to spot and fight. While the state has retained the ability to suppress movements violently, it now has more subtle techniques to control dissent. For example, the state (through the police) learned early on that it is easier to manage mass demonstration through negotiations (often carried out through their community policing departments) than it is through direct physical means. Rather than violently beating protestors and strikers, which tends to create martyrs

and to radicalize people, the state has found ways to "regulate" the time, location, direction, and nature of marches and picket lines through the use of permits and "protest zones."<sup>22</sup> It is these types of "soft" techniques that are ignored by some. The focus on the "hard" suppression of movements that dominates much of the work of writers like Parenti and Churchill tends to obscure the "softer" side of control, which in the long run is equally destructive.

## Endnotes

1. The full citation for the book is the following: Christian Parenti, *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (New York: Verso, 1999).
2. Christian Parenti, *Talking Liberties: Prison, Policing, and Surveillance in an Age of Crisis* [CD-ROM] (Oakland, California: AK Press, 2002), track #1, "Capitalism: Crisis and Response."
3. Ibid., track #1, "Capitalism: Crisis and Response."
4. Parenti elaborates on this point in *Lockdown America*, where he documents that prisons are not economically profitable.
5. Parenti, *Taking Liberties*, track #1, "Capitalism: Crisis and Response."
6. Ibid., track #4, "Surveillance Prior to 9-11."
7. Ibid., track #5, "Deciphering the U.S.A. Patriot Act."
8. Other books by Ward Churchill include *The COINTELPRO Papers*, *Indians are Us*, *Fantasies of a Master Race*, and *FBI Secretes*.
9. Ward Churchill, *In a Pig's Eye: Reflections on the Police State, Repression, and Native America*. (Oakland: AK Press, 2002)
10. Ibid., disk one, track #4, "A 500 Year War."
11. Ibid., disk one, track #4, "A 500 Year War."
12. Ibid., disk one, track #7, "A Nation of Their Own."
13. Ibid., disk one, track #12, "You have a Police State."
14. Ibid., disk 2, track #8, "Repression Evolves."
15. Ibid., disk 2, track #12, "Our Obligation."
16. Stanley Cohen is best known within academic and mainstream circles for coining the term "moral panic" back in the late 1970s. The term describes the tendency for societies to "panic" and overreact to perceived deviant behavior, such as we are currently experiencing around "terrorism."
17. Stanley Cohen's book, *Visions of Social Control: Crime, Punishment, and Classification* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1985), describes this tendency of the state.
18. Ibid., 2.
19. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
20. Stanley Cohen, *Visions of Social Control*, 217.
21. Ibid., 142.
22. Don Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (New York: Guilford Press, 2003).

# Breaking the Law: Anti-authoritarian Visions of Crime and Justice

by Randall Amster

By now it is obvious to almost everyone that current “criminal justice” practices are at best ineffective and at worst brutal. Critics on many fronts have attacked the *prison-industrial complex*, with its “three-strikes” laws and for-profit bureaucratic schemes. Even the mainstream media have reported on the United States’ record rates of incarceration, the privatization of the prison industry, corporate use of convict labor, prison overcrowding, and the increasing application of the death penalty. There is now broad outrage at this systematized insanity masking as “law and order” and many have begun to search for alternative methods of understanding concepts such as crime, punishment, and justice. There is cause for hope in this, but also concern, given that so much still needs to be done and that the current crisis continues to worsen dramatically.

In exploring other possibilities, it is instructive at the outset to consider the radical notion that the present *law-and-order* paradigm ought to be abandoned entirely, as many in anti-racist, anti-authoritarian, and anarchist circles have increasingly argued. Indeed, it is often taken as axiomatic in the anarchist lexicon that “laws” (as they have come to be understood in modern society) must be wholly rejected. While this is a view that I have echoed and endorsed in previous works,<sup>1</sup> it is nonetheless crucial to understand the full implications of such a position. After all, while there is a certain seductive quality to the belief that, once freed from the shackles of law, human communities will spontaneously develop egalitarian and inclusive social practices, it is still often the case that “the aspect of anarchist ideas of social organization which people find hardest to swallow is the anarchist rejection of the law, the legal system, and the agencies of law enforcement.”<sup>2</sup> To merely accept the abolition of law as an anti-authoritarian *fait accompli*, then, is to

*Restorative Justice: Healing the Foundations of Our Everyday Lives*  
By Dennis Sullivan & Larry Tifft  
Monsey, NY: Willow Tree Press, 2001

*The Struggle to be Human: Crime, Criminology, and Anarchism*  
By Larry Tifft & Dennis Sullivan  
Orkney, UK: Cienfuegos Press, 1980

oversimplify the issue and risk speaking a language that is counter-intuitive to many that we would hope to reach with our words and visions.

Luckily, we have lights on the horizon such as Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tifft to help us navigate through such conundrums. In a series of collaborations spanning nearly twenty-

five years, Sullivan and Tifft have consistently advanced a positive and organic vision of social processes that exist beyond the strictures of law, authority, and the state. Serving quite literally as “bookends” to their body of shared scholarship, *The Struggle to be Human* (with sections including “Law: An Instrument of Authority” and “The Wish to be Free: Commitment to Eden”) and *Restorative Justice* (with chapters entitled “The Violence of Power” and “A Radical Perspective on Crime and Social Harm”) evoke the creative powers of human intellect and imagination, and serve as much-needed benchmarks for any anti-authoritarian project that seeks to critically interpret and deconstruct prevailing

myths about law, the state, and the criminal justice system. And although their formulations have some shortcomings and moments in need of qualification, we ought to be eminently thankful for these works of sanity in a world that has seemingly gone mad with bureaucratic regulation and punitive predilections.

The starting point for their mutual exegesis is aptly stated in the introduction to *The Struggle to be Human*, namely that “we can never find meaning or freedom in living if we consider life processes from the floundering orbits of law, the state or corporate economy, but only through lifting ourselves to the warmth of experience and human community.”<sup>3</sup> Amplifying their point and tapping into longstanding anti-authoritarian and anarchist tenets, Sullivan and Tifft continue their missive: “All law, authority and institutions of state are based on





force, violence and the fear of punishment.<sup>4</sup> . . . The function of law historically has been to deny some people the right to their personal journey, to detain us, by demanding that we resolve our contradictions within the confines of law and the state. . . . Law prohibits us from freeing ourselves, experiencing ourselves in the struggle to be human.<sup>5</sup> . . . To accept law, therefore is to accept a reality in which there is imposition of person upon person. It is to accept the reality of enslavement, the plantation of the welfare state. It is to accept the division of the world into parts that translate into subject and objects, and the mechanisms to manage this hierarchical division, denying autonomy to everyone.”<sup>6</sup>

The above passage is notable on a number of levels. First, it represents the authors’ attempt to expand the criminological paradigm beyond its preordained walls of “law and order” rhetoric—no small feat at a time when few had the temerity to raise such concerns. Second, these sentiments serve to locate the authors specifically within the anarchist tradition of scholarship and praxis, going back at least to Kropotkin’s famous insight that, “We are so perverted by an education which from infancy seeks to kill in us the spirit of revolt, and to develop that of submission to authority; we are so perverted by this existence under the ferrule of a law, which regulates every event in life—our birth, our education, our development, our love, our friendship—that, if this state of things continues, we shall lose all initiative, all habit of thinking for ourselves.”<sup>7</sup> Finally, the above passage also indicates a tendency of the authors to border on the hyperbolic—a fact that is somewhat understandable when attempting to arouse passions for revolutionary change, but unnecessary for scholars whose powers of persuasion ultimately need not rely upon the vicissitudes of polemic.

Of course, simply pointing out the hierarchical and oppressive nature of “law” is well and good as an initial endeavor, but it does beg the question of how human communities will sustain and regulate themselves in the absence of law. On this point, the early work of Sullivan and Tiftt alludes to themes that will be fleshed out in more detail in the later writings, calling for communities grounded in “mutual aid, cooperation, spontaneity and peace,”<sup>8</sup> as well as “self-reciprocity,” “equity,”

and “love.”<sup>9</sup> Taken together, these strands serve to trace the boundaries of the authors’ vision of “a moral order in accordance with which people, from their inner convictions, act towards others as they desire that others should act toward them. It is a social order in which each is able to live and act according to his or her own judgment.”<sup>10</sup> Again, such themes comport with the anarchist tradition, from Kropotkin’s *Law and Authority* (“No more laws! No more judges! Liberty, equality, and practical human sympathy are the only effectual barriers we can oppose to the anti-social instincts of certain among us.”),<sup>11</sup> to Colin Ward’s *Anarchy in Action* (“We must eliminate all the social causes of crime, we must develop in man brotherly feelings, and mutual respect; we must seek useful alternatives to crime.”).<sup>12</sup>

At this point, however, the thesis begins to fray a bit around the edges, mostly due to difficulties in enunciating precisely what such “alternatives to crime” will look like in actual practice and application. Certainly, such difficulties are not unique to Sullivan and Tiftt’s work, but rather have been a central challenge for anarchist writers from Godwin to the present—and while they do cite positive examples of reconciliation in their later work *Restorative Justice* (such as a shooting victim and his assailant meeting eleven years after the incident and achieving a modicum of understanding and forgiveness), it is still the case that specific details as to how the current crisis can be transformed and how alternative systems would deal with acts such as theft, assault, rape, or murder are sorely lacking here. This is not to say that these issues are not raised at all, but rather that they are mostly addressed in theoretical terms and not by way of concrete examples or working models.

Specifically, the theoretical question essentially becomes: “Can a society exist in which nothing limits the individual, where all regulation is an affair of the individual and not of the collective will?”<sup>13</sup> Answering this question, the Russian anarchist Alexei Borovoi states what some have taken as a *sine qua non* of anarchist thought (although, as we shall see, one that is not without controversy): “There has not been a single society, even prior to the birth of the State, that has not made certain demands upon its members. While specific regulations may vary from society to society, some form of regulation is



always necessary. Aside from legal codes, there exist in all societies what can be called codes of convention. The force of these codes is perhaps greater than the force of laws. The fundamental difference is that these codes are based on a collective accord."<sup>14</sup> As Giovanni Baldelli likewise notes in *Social Anarchism*, "No society is ethical in which each member does not naturally absorb its governing principles of right and wrong. Written law represents a generally unsuccessful substitute for a universal understanding of ethical principles."<sup>15</sup>

Here we begin to get a sense of the ambivalence anarchists have toward concepts such as "regulation" and "social control." Are we to grant such primacy to the individual that no form of collective intervention is acceptable? If we do allow collective intervention, how do we keep it from becoming authoritarian and destructive of individual liberty? In short, how do we avoid the pitfalls of law and the state while preserving the integrity of our communities? Struggling with such queries, the early work of Sullivan and Tifft reflects such ambivalence and even contradiction, initially asserting that, "Social custom, religious dogma and moral codes are yet more subtle forms of domination which, like education and official propaganda, are harnessed by the state to perform as ancillary functions of law."<sup>16</sup> Later in the same work, however, the authors endorse a view of communities that are regulated not by laws but by "mutual agreements" and by "a sum of social customs and habits."<sup>17</sup> Expanding on this ambivalence within anarchism, Colin Ward similarly endorses "values and norms" as substitutes for law, whereas anarcho-anthropologist Harold Barclay cautions against "the confusion of the term *law* with *norm* or *custom* in such a way as to claim that anarchist societies have law."<sup>18</sup>

Specifically, Barclay is objecting to the work of writers such as Thom Holterman and Henc van Maarseveen, who published an influential anthology titled *Law and Anarchism*.<sup>19</sup> In their respective chapters, Holterman observes that anarchists often deny that their moral duties to other community members have anything to do with the law, asking "Why not recognize that it is law, but law which comes from society and not law which is imposed by the state?"<sup>20</sup>—whereas van Maarseveen claims that "anarchists merely reject

a particular sort of law; law as such is not rejected. . . . The anarchist political order implies the existence of a system of legal rules."<sup>21</sup> Criticizing this work as mainly an "attempt to reconcile anarchism with legal theory . . . primarily by confusing and obfuscating terms," Barclay points out that it is imperative to recognize that "there are on the one hand rules which are imposed by the state through its government—in other words, laws—and there are other kinds of rules not imposed by the state. . . . An anarchist society is clearly different from a state society in that in it there would be no penal sanctions—no law."<sup>22</sup> As Borovoi likewise observes, "anarchism admits social norms. The norms of a free society resemble neither in spirit nor in form the laws of contemporary society. These norms will not seek the detachment of the individual from the collectivity. Anarchist norms will not be a torrent of decrees from a higher authority."<sup>23</sup>

To their credit, Sullivan and Tifft do not fall into the trap of equating anarchist norms with "laws," but instead maintain a sharply critical stance toward all state-bound modes of criminality and sanctioning practices. In fact, certain passages in *The Struggle to be Human* presage the more detailed explications of their later work through references to concepts such as "face-to-face justice," "the airing of conflicts," and "the reality of returning to work and living with the other person,"<sup>24</sup> embodying what Jeff Ferrell has

built upon as "an anarchist criminology which argued for replacing state/legal 'justice' with a fluid, face-to-face form of justice grounded in emerging human needs."<sup>25</sup> Indeed, Ferrell nicely anticipates the linguistic direction that Sullivan and Tifft will take, since by the time we arrive at the publication of *Restorative Justice*, much of the overt language of anarchist theory and scholarship has been replaced by concepts such as "apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation,"<sup>26</sup> as well as the frequent invocation of notions of "restorative communities" and "needs-based justice." While there is nothing especially problematic about this subtle yet noticeable shift from *anarchist* to *restorative* terminology, it does signal certain changes in form and substance that mark points of distinction—and at times even tension—between the authors' earlier and later works.





To be sure, there is a palpable sense of caution and even respectability in the language of *Restorative Justice* that is largely lacking in *The Struggle to be Human*. This does not mean, however, that the nature of the collaborative project of these “journeymen provocateurs”<sup>27</sup> is any less radical, but perhaps indicates a more measured perspective on the difficulties of maintaining a lifetime of opposition to state-bound practices and remaining faithful to a vision that is contraindicated in much of the society that we are constrained to inhabit. In other words, where their younger selves had no compunction against resorts to hyperbolic language and straightforward calls for revolutionary praxis, the latter versions appear more concerned with developing the nature of the vision more keenly before issuing such plaintive calls. But again, this is not to imply that the fervor has waned, only perhaps that it has sharpened its focus in terms of what it has stood *against* and as to what it will stand *for*. Indeed, it might fairly be said that Sullivan and Tifft comprise—along with “peacemaking criminologists” such as Hal Pepinsky<sup>28</sup>—the “anarchist wing” of an emerging social movement called “restorative justice” that seeks to move beyond punitive models in favor of processes of reintegration and reconciliation. In fact, this might be considered an important evolution of both the *anarchist* and *criminal justice* dialogues, in the sense of extending the historical arc of Godwin, Kropotkin, Ward, et al., but also by charting new paths with the introduction of concepts such as reconciliation and restoration as fundamentals of anti-authoritarian praxis.

The essence of *Restorative Justice* is that “we must move to create personal relationships, social arrangements, and communities that promote patterns of interaction that are non-hierarchical, non-power-based.”<sup>29</sup> The central notion is that “justice-done restoratively requires that participants continually remain open to each other’s concerns, ideas, needs, feelings, desires, pain and suffering, so that each can see the other not as a resource to be used or exploited or as an object to be derided or scorned, but as he or she is, similar to oneself, a person engaged in an unending struggle to become human, with dignity. . . . When such collaboration takes place, we experience the beginnings of a restorative community, of a political economy of peace and democracy.”<sup>30</sup> Here, it might well be objected that Sullivan and Tifft appear naïve,

calling essentially for a world in which people are simply supposed to be nice to each other. But this critique misses the larger point that for Sullivan and Tifft it has always been the case that “spirituality must precede social change . . . a spiritual awakening is necessary . . . the social revolution must come from within,”<sup>31</sup> indicating a rationale for these earnest appeals to the better instincts and higher ideals of human consciousness.

Moreover, despite linguistic overtures to concepts such as “democracy,” it is clear that this is still essentially an anarchist project premised upon “solidarity, compassion, cooperation, friendliness, unselfishness, and peacefulness,”<sup>32</sup> evidenced by the authors’ express commitment to examine “all forms of violence and power, all ideologies, perspectives, practices, and social arrangements that in any way force others into positions of lesser being, into deficit status, that disallow their needs to be taken into account.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, while the explicit use of the term *anarchism* has been omitted, implicit references to anarchist theory and practice are rife throughout *Restorative Justice*. As one might expect, Kropotkin in particular is given due consideration for his penchant for “moral development” and “equal well-being.”<sup>34</sup> Harold Barclay’s work also figures into the argument: “Anthropologists of every ilk have shown us multitudinous examples of societies that have neither laws nor a state but which are every bit concerned about justice, reparation, and human well-being.”<sup>35</sup> Throughout the text, it is made clear that any such undertaking—toward restorative

justice and away from state-bound “law and order” motifs—must also include “calling the larger set of social arrangement into question.”<sup>36</sup> In other words, the restorative justice vision is not simply one of opting out and creating model communities of harmony and peace, but rather taking on the fundamental bases of hierarchy and structural violence that permeate modern society. In this sense, the project has not lost any of its radicalism but instead seems to have begun to come to terms with the sheer magnitude of its aim.

So let me be clear that the principles espoused by the later Sullivan and Tifft do not reflect an accommodation or appeasement. In their collaborative and individual writings there is a pervasive sense that one who takes their teachings to heart will be called upon to stand against the state, to be an outsider vis-à-vis mainstream society, to be



viewed as a lawbreaker and even a heretic. Here, Sullivan and Tift are in excellent company, including the legendary Henry David Thoreau, who stated in *Civil Disobedience* that: "Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice. . . . [B]ut if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then I say, break the law." As Robert Paul Wolff inquires in his tome *In Defense of Anarchism*: "But on what grounds can it be claimed that I have an obligation to obey the laws which are made in my name by a man who has no obligation to vote as I would, who indeed has no effective way of discovering what my preferences are on the measure before him? . . . [T]he citizens have created a legitimate state at the price of their own autonomy! They have bound themselves to obey laws which they do not will, and indeed even laws which they vigorously reject. Insofar as democracy originates in such a promise, it is no more than voluntary slavery."<sup>37</sup>

Sullivan and Tift are obviously not unaware of such eventualities, having noted in *The Struggle to be Human* that "Laws are so numerous that no one could possibly not break them. There are laws that individuals choose to break and laws which individuals are forced to break. . . . If all laws were strictly enforced, everybody would be criminalized."<sup>38</sup> As things stand today, we may not be far from such a condition, with modern society coming to represent what the authors have referred to in *Restorative Justice* as a "panopticon gulag."<sup>39</sup> Indeed, this makes the stated aim of people such as Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tift all the more urgent, namely "to create a society where it is easier for people to be good, a society in which we can better enjoy each other's company. To create this kind of society is our daily prayer and the reason for our undertaking."<sup>40</sup> All who are struggling for justice, compassion, and dignity, will feel a kinship with these visionaries; I for one am thankful for their example, teachings, and legacy as stalwarts in the quest to attain just human relations. Their books ought to be read and embraced by anyone interested in shining a light on the brutalities of today and exploring the possibilities for realizing a brighter tomorrow.

## Endnotes

1. See Randall Amster, "Restoring (Dis)order: Sanctions, Resolutions, and 'Social Control' in Anarchist Communities," *Contemporary Justice Review* 6, March 2003; "Chasing Rainbows? Utopian Pragmatics and the Search for Anarchist Communities," *Anarchist Studies* 9, March 2001.
2. Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 126.
3. Larry Tift and Dennis Sullivan, *The Struggle to be Human: Crime, Criminology, and Anarchism* (Orkney, UK: Cienfuegos Press, 1980), 3.
4. Ibid., 7.
5. Ibid., 39.
6. Ibid., 40.
7. Peter Kropotkin, "Law and Authority," in *Kropotkin's Revolutionary Pamphlets* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1927).
8. Tift and Sullivan, *The Struggle to be Human*, 47.
9. Ibid., 178.
10. Ibid., 146.
11. See note 7.
12. Colin Ward, *Anarchy in Action*, 131.
13. Alexei Borovoi, "Anarchism and Law," *Friends of Malatesta* (Buffalo, NY, undated pamphlet), 2.
14. Ibid., 4.
15. Giovanni Baldelli, *Social Anarchism* (New York: Aldine-Atherton, 1971), 150-1.
16. Tift and Sullivan, *The Struggle to be Human*, 44.
17. Ibid., 72.
18. Harold Barclay, "Law and Anarchism," in *Culture and Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1997), 154.
19. Thom Holterman and Henc van Maarseveen (eds.), *Law and Anarchism* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1984).
20. Ibid., 27.
21. Ibid., 66.
22. Harold Barclay, "Law and Anarchism," 153-5.
23. Borovoi, "Anarchism and Law," 8.
24. Tift and Sullivan, *The Struggle to be Human*, 74.
25. Jeff Ferrell, "Against the Law: Anarchist Criminology," *Social Anarchism* 25, 1998.
26. Dennis Sullivan and Larry Tift, *Restorative Justice: Healing the Foundations of Our Everyday Lives* (Monsey, NY: Willow Tree Press, 2001), viii.
27. Ibid., xxvi.
28. See, e.g., Harold E. Pepinsky, "Communist Anarchism as an Alternative to the Rule of Criminal Law," *Contemporary Crises* 2, 1978; Harold E. Pepinsky & Richard Quinney (eds.), *Criminology as Peacemaking* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991).
29. Sullivan & Tift, *Restorative Justice*, 160.
30. Ibid., 119.
31. Tift and Sullivan, *The Struggle to be Human*, 147-51.
32. Sullivan and Tift, *Restorative Justice*, 54.
33. Ibid., 129.
34. Ibid., 113, 119.
35. Ibid., 143 (quoting Harold Barclay, *People Without Government: An Anthropology of Anarchism* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1982)).
36. Ibid., 71.
37. Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 29, 42.
38. Tift and Sullivan, *The Struggle to be Human*, 58.
39. Sullivan and Tift, *Restorative Justice*, 10.
40. Ibid., 194.



# Appropriating "Another World"

by Sureyyya Evren

When I wrote David Graeber<sup>1</sup> and informed him that our new collection of essays in Turkish is being published under the title *Another World is Possible*<sup>2</sup>—including a translation of his article "The Globalization Movement," which later became "The New Anarchists"<sup>3</sup>—he noted that many books, in many different languages, are being published with the same title. Graeber is correct, and this should probably be seen as a form of written solidarity and linguistic internationalism from the global/local movements that are now emerging onto the political scene in so many parts of the world.

The movement we are talking about is known as the anti-globalization movement, the global justice movement, the global democracy movement (as David McNally prefers<sup>4</sup>), or global/local movements. There may be other alternatives I forget here and maybe it is enough when we simply say The Movement (even if we actually mean movements). I suspect that our difficulty naming ourselves is a reaction to the existing naming strategies used by those in power (especially the corporate media) and it shows the serious need to use more flexible categories while defining ourselves than the old, stiff categories that easily create manichaeistic divisions. The slogan "Another World is Possible" always express the idea that we do not want to name the world we are struggling; that we just know that we don't want the same old world, that we know what we oppose. As the Zapatista *encuentros* declared earlier, we are organizing "against neo-liberalism and global capitalism." We are anti-capitalist, anti-militarist, anti-globalization, anti-WTO, anti-IMF, anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-hierarchical, anti-statist, anti-sweatshop, anti-x. The most *anti-* generation in modern political history is in the streets...

So, here we have three books that want to engage these *anti-*s and to some extent change and even manipulate the Movement. They are *The Anti-Capitalism Reader: Imagining a Geography of Opposition*, edited by Joel Schalit, *Another World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism* by David McNally, and *From ACT Up to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era of Globalization*, edited by Benjamin Sheppard and Ronald Hayduk.

When I said "even manipulate" I especially had in mind *The Anti-Capitalism Reader* (ACR). At first, ACR looks like a solid anti-market book that is trying to grapple with today's

*The Anti-Capitalism Reader: Imagining a Geography of Opposition*  
By Joel Schalit (editor)  
New York: Akashic Books, 2002

*Another World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism*  
By David McNally  
Winnipeg, Manitoba: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2002

*From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era of Globalization*  
By Benjamin Shepard and Ronald Hayduk (editors)  
New York: Verso, 2002

capitalism in its many aspects (from culture and economics to the public sphere and anti-capitalist movements). The index includes essays with appealing titles and there at least three "stars" in the anthology: Naomi Klein's famous article on Zapatistas and Marcos—"The Unknown Icon"—is republished here and there are interviews with Slavoj Žižek and Antonio Negri. Some time ago, one of my friends told me that he got a book on "anti-capitalism" (it was ACR) and asked my opinion about translating and publishing it in Turkish. I just looked at titles and flipped through the pages and, without reading it, said "Sure,

looks like a rich book on the anti-globalization movement." What a mistake! What a lesson for me! When I actually read ACR, I saw that it is an authoritarian, sectarian, orthodox marxist attempt to appropriate the anti-globalization movement. I called my friend early in the morning with severe feelings of guilt and told him what the book is really like. If it is going to be translated to Turkish it should be done by some Marxist party or group, who reject the decentralized character of the Movement in principle: I would be the last person to contribute to this.

Two types of pieces characterize ACR; essays addressed to sectarian Marxist readers that debate what to do with the new anti-authoritarian movement and essays written to teach anti-globalization activists how to stop being members of the anti-globalization movement and start being socialist party pawns (or, to put it differently, essays teaching the Movement how to stop being itself and turn into a campaign for parliamentary elections). The authors in ACR do not understand what the movement is and do not try to listen to it. Instead, like the corporate media, they only see symbols, and prefer to manipulate.

But they are not, as Žižek notes, so stupid as to represent themselves as they truly are.<sup>5</sup> So many titles are misleading. Paul Thomas's essay "What News from Genoa? Varieties of Anti-Capitalist Experience" does not intend to explain or discuss varieties of anti-capitalist experience (in Genoa, for example). Instead, he praises Marx and Marxism and tries to prove that Marx was the father of all revolutionary sons (ACR shelters in some sexism too, I will note later) with entertaining phrases like "There is a patterning to the galaxy, with Marxism as its lode star."<sup>6</sup> This essay should really be titled "The Real Origin of Genoa and other Anti-Capitalist Experiences is Marx and No One and Nothing Else."

John Brady's essay "The Public Sphere in the Era of Anti-Capitalism" criticizes the Movement for overemphasizing the public sphere as a political arena and, instead, proposes "political parties, parliament, and the state administration."<sup>7</sup> He is unhappy that the radical democratic Left's energy has been focused on the public sphere and civil society so much and that efforts to mobilize within the electoral arena are increasingly dismissed. For Brady, the parliamentary road is "the path anti-capitalist left must follow."<sup>8</sup> Unbelievably, he writes without hesitation that "after all, in modern democracies the will of the people is expressed most directly through elections."<sup>9</sup> This makes you feel like, "what am I reading?" Brady seriously has no idea what has been going on since Seattle and what the radical Left has been doing (or maybe he is just making fun of us).

And Scott Schaffer's "From Bunny Rabbits to Barricades: Strategies of Anti-Capitalist Resistance" is not about strategies of anti-capitalist resistance. Schaffer believes that the newest phase of anti-market struggles lack a "practical politics" and thus *he* proposes strategies. (What a misunderstanding! The "newest phase of anti-market struggles" is actually based on organizing with "practical politics" and even the ideology of the movement lies in its way of organizing.) The title should be "Strategies for Anti-Capitalist Resistance" because, instead of finding out and discussing strategies that are used in the anti-capitalist resistance, he only wants to make suggestions.

In fact, the name of the book is completely misleading. It should have been called *As Marx Described It*—as one of the contributors of ACR, Charlie Bertsch, says to Henwood during an interview.<sup>10</sup>

Among the committed Leninists in ACR, Doug Henwood seems a little more critical and sometimes tries to understand what's going on. And he also provides a good example of how Marxist intellectuals write to other Marxist intellectuals. You should read the passages in which he refers to activists as "kids," which they—Marxists intellectuals—can shape efficaciously. (Just to note: a tendency towards gerontocracy reveals itself often in ACR. For example, speaking of activists, Henwood states that "the kids are grateful to hear a coherent analysis of how the parts of the system fit together"<sup>11</sup> or "I think it often tends to be juvenile in practice. A lot of it is an infantile 'NO!' translated into political philosophy."<sup>12</sup> Likewise, John Brady says, "After all, the mobilization against global capital is still in its infancy."<sup>13</sup> While these quotations do not prove anything in themselves, they suggest a perspective.) Although Henwood knows that activists have had little tolerance for similar takeover attempts, he is still hopeful for Marxism. "It seems like it would be far more efficacious for marxist

intellectuals to talk with the protesters, to engage them in conversation with some modesty, perhaps even a touch of awe."<sup>14</sup>

Talking about anarchists as the "other," Henwood and Bertsch are interested in "them" and "their ideology." Henwood was struck by the anarchists' organizational model, which combined incredible flexibility with great discipline, and the spirit of it, which combined great seriousness and fun. Henwood found anarchist protests "erotic."<sup>15</sup> (Similarly, in Turkey and perhaps other parts of the world too, the corporate media often refers to news stories and events with lots of pain, blood, and scandal as "sexy.") He tries to make fun of anarchism, but he is also afraid of its successes (which he witnessed). This is a typical orthodox Marxist, defensive reaction.

His interview with Zizek begins with a question like "what we are going to do with this growing anarchist influence?" Zizek is no doubt a good writer and an exceptional thinker and it is always a pleasure to read his analyses, even if you do not agree. He is a good interdisciplinary thinker who combines an analysis of popular culture, academic debates, and political demands in a brilliant way. The last book I read by him was, *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway*, which is a good example of his style—skilful interpretations that you can admire even if you don't embrace them.

But he seems uninformed if not ignorant when the subject comes to anarchism, particularly when he says "For me, the tragedy of anarchism is that you end up having an authoritarian secret society trying to achieve anarchist goals."<sup>16</sup> On the contrary, this looks like the tragedy of the far-away, intellectual-observer. This statement provides only one insight: the Great Zizek writes brilliantly on September 11th but he is not really interested in the anti-globalization movement and actual political struggles and doesn't spend much time trying to understand what emerged in Seattle and after. He even claims that there is always "one person (in the anarchist groups), accepted by some unwritten rules as the secret master."<sup>17</sup>

### ***Another World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-capitalism***

The other marxist book we have here is David McNally's *Another World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-capitalism*, which is a very basic book for the most part. McNally, who is full of good intentions and a New Leftist of the old generation, wants to show the path to the new generation. But why? To appropriate? I don't want to cast blame: his Marxist but non-sectarian view looked very genuine to me.

To a great extent *Another World is Possible* (AWP) is like a long-pamphlet explaining why capitalism is bad, why the big companies are bad, and why we should change them. Despite the McNally's obvious good intentions, there are serious orthodoxy problems in the book, like economic determinism. We can take racism as an example. McNally gives false or insufficient information about the creation of the concept of race. Of course it is always a good starting point to note that the concept "race" was created and fabricated, but it was not created by rich white Americans to divide the poor whites from poor people of color in eighteenth century America (even though rich whites did use racism to divide poor whites from poor people of color).<sup>18</sup> Such simplifications and economic determinism just do not help. On the other hand, why doesn't McNally interpret, for example Robert Bernasconi's works on race and racism in continental philosophy? And race and racism in the Locke's work—whose philosophy is very important for the United States and slavery—and Kant and Hegel and the Enlightenment are not insignificant issues.

But this basic book, with many disputable assertions, is much better than the ACR because McNally really is interested in the Movement, and is trying to understand, theorize, and improve it. Clearly he put a lot of work into this book, and he devotes many pages to detailed discussions of important movement actions around the globe. While it was an unlucky experience to read ACR, reading AWP makes you reflect on the global history of protests and contemporary strategies. The barrier that prevents him from entering the "soul" of the movement probably lies in his belief in centralized politics. He quotes a slogan from a May Day 2001 banner in London: "Overthrow capitalism—and replace it with something nicer!" and notes that "the designer of this banner has humorously called for replacing capitalism with 'something nicer'—without any attempt to name what that might be. That 'something nicer' needs a name. Social movements will not develop if they refuse to name and define alternative possibilities."<sup>19</sup>

This is where AWP falls apart: this slogan has the same logic as the slogan "Another World is Possible" and the authors of both probably have a vision of social alternatives. But what they are trying to do is to send a message to other anti-capitalists who are working for these alternatives. Both express a strong emphasis on direct action, because they are not utopian and because they intend to change the present. And "Another World" is not a world you will see before you die; it is an ideal. That's why banner writers do not name their alternatives, but instead name their desire to create them through alternative forms of organizing against capitalism.

In any case, as I said before, I do not want to be too negative about McNally. He is surely a committed activist, a writer

with a strong global revolutionary perspective, and AWP is full of insights. Although I don't agree with many of his points of view, I felt grateful for his book.

### Politicizing Differences Together

One last point I want to make about ACR, which relates with Shepard and Hayduk's work, has to do with Annalee Newitz's essay "Peace, Love, Linux: When the Open Source Movement Got in Bed with Capitalism." This is an example of another misleading title in ACR, which actually hides the homophobia of the author. Newitz's essay focuses on proving that open source and free software folks are in reality true perverts, queers, S/M or kinky fetish fans, how they make collections of lesbian fisting videos, etc. Of course Newitz also mention the relation between free/open source software and the market, but this is not the main subject of the essay. It is obvious that Newitz does not like these "queer and polyamorous communities" and starts the last paragraph with this meaningful sentence "open sexuality is no alternative to capitalism."<sup>20</sup>

Time to talk about *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest Community Building in the Era of Globalization* (ACTUP/WTO), edited by Benjamin Shepard and Ronald Hayduk. This book is certainly written from inside the Movement and reflects its soul entirely. As Eric Rofes states in the introduction, it is an attempt at "creating a new literature for a new era of community organizing."<sup>21</sup>

Shepard and Hayduk defend the idea that Act Up (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) played a central role in the rings of actions that led to Seattle. Although they exaggerate a little bit at times, particularly when they claim and/or imply that Seattle was born from ACT UP, exaggeration is inevitable in all arts and I suppose that they do this on purpose, in a carnivalesque spirit.

As Shepard remarks; Seattle was not one movement but the result of many. And ACTUP/WTO contains many essential studies and first hand accounts of how these movements organized. Considering that the ideology of the Movement lies in its way of organizing, this book on practical politics is key for those who want to study its meaning. It is a movement which is "decentralized, based on coordination rather than unification, deriving its strength and vitality from the autonomy and self-determination of its component parts," as Leslie Kaufman writes.<sup>22</sup>

ACTUP/WTO explores forms of direct action and the role they have played. It presents a history of movements following and developing similar methods, offers a historical look at the spokescouncils and affinity groups, advances anti-sectarian organizing principles, and of course provides many,

many examples and direct narratives. Starhawk's "How we really shut down the WTO" draws an accurate picture. As she states: "our model of power was decentralized, and leadership was invested in the group as a whole. People were empowered to make their own decisions, and the centralized structures were for coordination, not control."<sup>23</sup>

### Queering the global/local movements

ACTUP/WTO makes the reader navigate through organizing processes of WHAM, Reclaim the Streets, the Lesbian Avengers, among others. They are queering the political powerfully in this volume and show the central role of community organizing in detail. They carry their focus to the Zapatistas and explore hacktivism (their discussions with Electronic Disturbance Theater member, Ricardo Dominguez, are especially rich). Ana Nogueira's article on "the birth and promise of Indymedia revolution" shows how alternative media worked in the Movement and helped it improve. Saying more about the articles here would require many more details about many specific actions and organizations covered in the book, which are all the part of the Movement.

Even though ACTUP/WTO is surely not a "white" book, and raises many topics about race and race conflicts, it does focus a little too much on American movements. But why not? Someone could argue that it is not necessary for every book to cover the entire world. However, I am sure that Seattle has roots in many parts of the world, and McNally was very good when he was searching for them.

Anyway, ACTUP/WTO presents a lot of helpful information and valuable perspectives for a revolutionary transformation of politics and everyday life. Now, this is the book that I would like to help translate.

"Another World" is and has always been a very flexible category, especially when compared to concepts advanced by earlier revolutionary movements. And this is not a critique: I feel like this is what we need right now: more flexible categories and open structures instead of closed ones. Italo Calvino could be the writer of the moment. His *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* is a book on literature but the main concepts are at work in the Movement too: lightness, quickness, exactitude, visibility, multiplicity, and consistency.

For a Politics as a broader network...

### Endnotes

1. Graeber teaches at Yale University and writes for a variety of movement publications. He is the author of *Toward an Anthropological Theory of Value: The False Coin of Our Own Dreams* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001) and an active member of the anti-globalization movement.

2. *Another World Is Possible*, ed. Sureyya Evren & Rahmi G. Ogdul (Istanbul: Studyo Imge Books, 2002). This book is on the anti-globalization movements and related theories. The first part explores what we call "preliminary events"; Los Angeles 1992, Indonesia 1998, and the Zapatistas. After this part, in my piece "Third Anarchist Boom," I focus on three periods of world anarchism: from the beginning to 1938; after 1968; and then after Seattle 1999, and argue that these three eras have three different characters and try to figure out the character of the last era. Also included are excerpts from Internet news, magazine articles, first hand witness accounts of actions, analyses, and reports on parallel protests and events from Turkey; ranging from anti-globalization protests, anti-war protests, the gay and lesbian movement, and anti-Sacrifice Ritual actions. There are also related theoretical articles on feminism, body, space, potlatch, translations of interviews with key figures like Michael Hardt, José Bové, and Todd May and related articles on the new situation from Turkish writers such as Yasar Cabuklu, Erden Kosova, Isik Erguden, Rahmi G. Ogdul, and myself.
3. David Graeber, "The New Anarchists," *New Left Review* 13, January–February 2002, <http://www.newleftreview.net/NLR24704.shtml>.
4. See "Note On Terminology," where McNally writes "[This is] my preferred term for the so-called anti-globalization movement, as it emphasizes the commitment of activists to global justice." David McNally, *Another World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2002), 7.
5. Slavoj Zizek cited in Doug Henwood, "Interview with Slavoj Zizek," in *The Anti-Capitalism Reader: Imagining a Geography of Opposition*, ed. Joel Schalit (New York: Akashic Books, 2002), 80.
6. Paul Thomas, "What News from Genoa? Varieties of Anti-Capitalist Experience," in *The Anti-Capitalism Reader: Imagining a Geography of Opposition*, ed. Joel Schalit (New York: Akashic Books, 2002), 54.
7. John Brady, "The Public Sphere in the Era of Anti-Capitalism," in *The Anti-Capitalism Reader: Imagining a Geography of Opposition*, ed. Joel Schalit (New York: Akashic Books, 2002), 62.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid., 63.
10. Charlie Bertsch, "Interview with Doug Henwood," in *The Anti-Capitalism Reader: Imagining a Geography of Opposition*, ed. Joel Schalit (New York: Akashic Books, 2002), 169.
11. Doug Henwood, "Interview with Slavoj Zizek," in *The Anti-Capitalism Reader: Imagining a Geography of Opposition*, ed. Joel Schalit (New York: Akashic Books, 2002), 44.

*Notes continued on page 25*



# New Argentine Social Movements: Logic and History

by Fernando López

In the last decade Argentines have been witnesses to and victims of the collapse of the system bequeathed by the dictatorship of 1976–1983. This system was prolonged by Alfonsín's post-dictatorship "hostage democracy," culminated in the robbery during Menem's rule of 1989–1999, and was continued by De la Rúa. It established immunity for a small group that concentrated the country's scarce resources in a few hands while condemning a third of the population to social exclusion. Faced with this brutality, our society generated varied and novel forms of resistance, as revealed in the social explosions that occurred in December 2001. They are called new social movements because, among other things, the labor organizations did not participate decisively and the social bases of these movements were impossible to frame professionally. Likewise, political organizations did not produce—and could not control—the new movements.

The protagonists of these revolts had been displaced from their sources of subsistence by the privatization of state-run businesses or budget cuts in the national and provincial states. They include landless peasants, those with precarious employment, ex-proletarians, and those excluded from salaried work in the urban and suburban centers, all whom achieved visibility in the media by successfully interrupting the circulation of merchandise on the national highways, thus earning a denomination that distorted their origins and the conditions of their existence. They are called *piqueteros* because the "picket" [blockade] is their most visible activity.

The first critical texts to report on the new situation were slow to appear and were not limited to the period immediately after December 2001. Those reviewed here contribute to the recent debate about the strategies and modalities assumed by the new actors in the social conflict. Raúl Zibechi's *Genealogía de la revuelta: Argentina, la sociedad en movimiento* (*Genealogy of the Revolt: Argentina, Society in Movement*) covers the last ten years of our history, documenting and analyzing the varied forms of these new social movements. He begins by reviewing the human rights movement and two of its paradigmatic organizations, the Madres de Plaza de Mayo and the HIJOS,<sup>1</sup> and then examines the 1990s, when hundreds of new groups exploded, and concludes by focusing on the most significant and novel of these groups, specifically the unemployed groups summed up under the term *piqueteros*.

*Hipótesis 891. Más allá de los piquetes*  
(*Hypothesis 891: Beyond the Pickets*)  
By Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano  
Buenos Aires: De Mano en Mano, 2002

*Genealogía de la revuelta. Argentina: la  
sociedad en movimiento*  
(*Genealogy of the Revolt: Argentina,  
Society in Movement*)  
By Raúl Zibechi  
Montevideo-La Plata-Buenos Aires:  
Nordan-Letra Libre, 2003

On the other hand, *Hipótesis 891. Más allá de los piquetes* (*Hypothesis 891: Beyond the Pickets*) is a collaborative text written by Colectivo Situaciones and the MTD de Solano (Unemployed Workers' Movement of Solano) that tries to enter the theoretical core of these new social movements. Colectivo Situaciones is a radical collective located in Buenos Aires, with roots in the student movement of the

1990s, and the MTD de Solano is an organization now grouping more than 800 families from various neighborhoods that has been struggling for the dispossessed since August 1997. Its participation in highway blockades and the *piquetero* movement is its most well known activity.

## *Hipótesis 891*

From the beginning it is clear that *Hipótesis 891* is an attempt to articulate a subject-object relationship: that is, a self-analysis of and by one of the emblematic organizations of the new generation of social movements. Arranged in three parts, the first section describes the methods employed by Colectivo Situaciones in the elaboration of the work and the result of the discussion workshops they co-organized with the MTD de Solano in September and October 2001. The second part, titled "Multiplicity and Counter-power in the *Piquetero* Experience," which is signed exclusively by Colectivo Situaciones, articulates their political-theoretical interpretations of this experience. The third part alternates between the MTD de Solano's evaluations of the discussion workshops and the evaluations of Colectivo Situaciones, which are conclusions of the dialogue. The dialogue explores the last two years and the way in which the MTD perceived its situation in the crisis that would affect the country between December 2001 until October 2002. In the conclusion, they review the visit made by John Holloway (author of *Change the World without Taking Power*) to the MTD de Solano's community storehouse. The value of this book lies not only in the discussions derived from the workshops held by Colectivo Situaciones and the MTD de Solano, but also in the project's theoretical richness.

Colectivo Situaciones begin the text by clearly establishing the type of the investigation that they are undertaking. They not only advance a method, but also take a stand against other methods of research. They counter-pose the academic theorist—who "objectifies" from outside and constitutes his

or her object by attributing values to it—to the activist theorist (*militante investigador*), who carries out research that puts his or her experience in relief and searches for insights that will intensify and strengthen his or her radical practice.

Likewise, they are critical of the methods of party militants and NGO, “humanitarian” activists. The first are loathed for their utilitarianism, strategic specialists, and the absence of dialogue, affinity, or authenticity and their replacement of these things by “tactics,” agreements, and representation. They write: “if we sustain the distinction—as we try throughout this book—between “politics” (understood as the struggle for power) and the experiences in which processes of the production of sociability or of [new] values enter in play, we thus can distinguish the political militant (who founds his or her discourse in some collection of certainties) from the activist theorist (who organizes his or her perspective around critical questions with respect to these certainties).”<sup>2</sup> The second group, the NGO humanitarians, are criticized for holding an idealized or unchangeable vision of the world and for overemphasizing (more or less exceptional) efforts in marginalized areas.

In contrast, they argue that activist theory is unique in the following four ways:

1. The character of the motivation that sustains the investigation is distinct.
2. The investigation has a practical character (i.e., its goal is to elaborate a situated, practical hypothesis).
3. The value of the investigated is only measured in specific situations.
4. Its development is already a result and this result creates an immediate intensification of practice.

Thus they are not advancing a political line, but rather a critique of “lines” and one that investigates and criticizes its own circumstances.

An example of this situated, critical perspective can be found in the MTD de Solano. This group is famous for its horizontal structure and creation of a counter-power that is not organized around the goal of seizing the state, but rather the transformation of society and the construction of new, radicalized webs of sociability. It does not fight for some postulated, ideal society that is outside of its experience but to transform its own immediate situation. Its labor consists of “strengthening different economic, political, cultural-artistic projects among the residents of the neighborhood and the families linked to the movement, in order to resolve problems such as unemployment, hunger, and education, but at the same time manages to produce social cohesion and multiplies the dimensions of existence (values and senses).”<sup>3</sup>

In a framework of fragmentation, misery, and impotence, the creation of horizontal forms of work and decision-making, structured around the principles of autonomy, pluralism, and respect for diversity, re-signify the highway blockade and the links with the state, converting the later into non-central instruments.

Colectivo Situaciones’s perspective has roots in identity, specifically that of the “excluded.” The “excluded” is one who is not only poor but also outside, in a territory from which there is no return. In fact, the category of “exclusion” has little to do with gradations of poverty: “exclusion is the specific form in which our society includes—represents—an increasing part of the society, that is ‘produced’ as excluded and constructed as such.”<sup>4</sup> This use of the idea of exclusion is successful because it names that which society produces as if it were something alien to itself and clarifies the fact that the included and the excluded are part of the same social order.

The power of the new social movements lay in their capacity to organize exclusion. Although the first data of identity is a “lack” (the unemployed, as someone who lacks work), the achievement is the creation of an identity that transcends the lack to affirm itself in a new practice. And if at first it was a protest activity—the picket [blockade], and from there the *piqueteros*—the economic and social initiatives produced by the movements generate new identities related to non-exploited, autonomous work. Thus the movements “do not announce their desire to ‘return to work,’ soliciting the reentry of a segment from the ruined social structure, that only could accept them in conditions that they have learned to despise. Neither included, nor excluded, but beyond these representations.”<sup>5</sup>

For Colectivo Situaciones, “The political—the statist, the party structure—belongs to our societies more like a machine that registers (misappropriating) the echoes of transformations underway than a productive site of these transformations.”<sup>6</sup> Although the end of the centrality of the political was seen as the end of history by neo-liberals and post-modernists—and the defeat of the whole project of social transformation—the end of the centrality of politics is not the end of politics. This work argues that it must be brought closer to the multiplicity of existence to assist in the “constitution of nuclei capable of producing a perspective internal to the experiences of the new sociability, strengthening it and making bonds, insights, and practical hypotheses.”<sup>7</sup>

### *Genealogy of the Argentine Revolt*

The book by Raúl Zibechi has a very different approach. Its great merit is that it puts the rapidly changing and overwhelming new social movements in perspective. His work

unravels hundreds of social experiences—that are very unique and yet share common features—and allows us to enter the history of each experience and the movement as a whole, a dynamic whole whose forms are being permanently redefined.

In his search for the origins of the new social movements, he goes as far back as the rise of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo during the first years of the 1976–1983 dictatorship and, later, to the formation of the HIJOS in the first years of democracy. He then covers the youth movements (built around fanzines and street musicians, etc), the free radio movement around 1989, the creation of the Central de los Trabajadores Argentinos in 1992, the six Encuentros de Organizaciones Sociales (Gatherings of Social Organizations) between 1997 and 1999 that became the Coordinadora de Organizaciones Populares Autónomas (Coordinator of Autonomous Popular Organizations) around 2000, to conclude with a minuscule history of the movements of the unemployed, who originated in shanty towns during the dictatorship and reappeared at the end of the 1990s with the radicalized orientation that is so recognizable today.

What defines these movements as new? For Zibechi this classification arises when the “instrumental” and rigid character of the older social movements<sup>8</sup> is compared with the autonomy and horizontalism of the contemporary movements, which are created from a base of interpersonal relations and that question the logic of “representation.” A theoretical affinity with Colectivo Situaciones is evident when he notes that these movements do not have their origin in a universalist discourse but, on the contrary, are generated by particular situations and produce political consequences without this being their express mission. The spectrum of the participants in the new social movements was represented in the second Encuentro de Organizaciones Sociales in March 1998, which was attended by participants in student and neighborhood groups, independent newspapers and magazines, low frequency radios, street performance groups, cultural centers, cooperatives, human rights organizations, NGOs, organizations working of issues of childhood and health, feminist and sexual minority groups, unemployed groups, and (minimally) unions. To this it would be necessary to add the squatters on state-owned and private lands and the new workers’ collectives in the occupied, self-managed factories.

Although the essay focuses on organizations of the type mentioned, significant space is devoted to analysis of the Central de los

Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA),<sup>9</sup> the dissident labor federation that arose in 1992 and became, for Zibechi, “the movement advanced experience that the labor movement in Latin America has produced since the defeat of the 1970s.”<sup>10</sup> He highlights the value of its territorial work,<sup>11</sup> “something totally exceptional in the labor movement in any part of the world,” the creation of a youth movement, and role occupied by the women and their emphasis on gender in the organization’s development. He highlights its combativity and internal democracy but notes that this vast and loose organization did not manage to attract the new social movements, which preferred to remain autonomous and shape their own networks. Zibechi explains this as a cultural difference, given the union’s rigid form and the centrality of votes and elections as means of decision-making. He displays a long list of reasons for this disconnection, but finally concludes that “The union of the masses can be as combative as it wants, but it does not belong to the category of movements that have emancipation as their ambition. It is inserted in the logic of progress and postulates the development and evolution of its members in this direction.”<sup>12</sup>

This strikes me as a prejudiced conclusion and one reminiscent of Lenin’s “DIAMAT,”<sup>13</sup> which only concedes trade-unionist ends to the labor movement and argues that The Party must bring consciousness to the workers. Here there is the—not very hidden—presence of the strong “reform versus revolution” antinomy that polarized the debate on the Left twenty years ago. And this is curious, because Zibechi’s attempt to rescue “exemplary” groups, such as the *piqueteros*, is premised not only on their horizontal and autonomous practices but also on their concept of revolution, which is



“The Future is Ours.” This photo was taken during protests at the World Trade Organization’s Ministerial Conference in Cancun, Mexico (September, 2003). By Luis Fernandez.

distinct from the “storm the palace” type of the old Marxist-Leninists. They, on the contrary, are involved in making daily and invisible changes, made along cultural lines and in small economic transformations, which would have been seen as reformist by the revolutionaries of the 1970s.<sup>14</sup> And what does it mean to transform society without taking power? This implies the generation of other powers, multiple powers, and creation of a movement replete with small reforms that transform the relations of domination while generating new areas of emancipation.<sup>15</sup> Why can't one argue that the CTA is also making such transformations? Doesn't it do so when it produces a territorial organization such as its Federación de Tierra y Vivienda, which is conceptually very close to the Landless Workers' Movement of Brazil and paves the way for land seizures by the unemployed, or the self-management and self-organization of seized factories (to which Zibechi proclaims his solidarity)? Certainly this is not a flagrant contradiction, at least as posed like this, especially, when Zibechi himself recognizes that the CTA raises similar claims, at times in the same terms, as the Encuentro de Organizaciones Sociales and that CTA Leader “Claudio Lozano<sup>16</sup> cites the phrase of Subcomandante Marcos “We will what type of militant or what type of man is generated by a movement that does not have seizing the state as its objective,”<sup>17</sup> and that the Secretary General of the CTA, Víctor De Gennaro, says that “the fight is outside of us, but also in our heart”[...] and explicitly rejects the culture of delegation to signal that ‘we do not delegate the solution of our problems. It is necessary to construct our own power,’ even further, other leaders speak of horizontalism.”<sup>18</sup> They are in fact participating in a project of social transformation, one that is doubtlessly different from that being perused by the new social movements. But there is more than one project of social transformation: the question—as always—is to search for the ways that they can coexist without suffocating one another.

The book continues with an analysis of the Coordinadora de Trabajadores Desocupados Aníbal Verón (Coordinator of the Unemployed Workers of Aníbal Verón) and the MTD de Solano and provisionally closes with commentary on the crisis that fired the events of December 2001.

Zibechi inevitably advances similar claims to those made by Colectivo Situaciones and at times cites and reinterprets them in simpler, more comprehensible language than one typically finds in their work. However, Zibechi believes that the movements cannot be understood solely in relation to local conditions but must be placed in the context of the evolution of these movements at the Latin American level. Indeed, this is the principal difference between both books, between the “in situation” perspective of Colectivo Situaciones and Zibechi's generalizing framework.

From the prologue on, Zibechi develops a definition of the struggle that contains two currents: one carries out the natural struggle for life, “for existence,” and the other is militarist in essence. He writes that the “daily struggle to assure sustenance and the reproduction of life consumes the greater part of the popular sector's energies. It is a creative struggle, for life. The other sense [of the struggle], the most frequent among activists and militants, refers to the struggle as a war or a confrontation, directed towards the annihilation of a real or imagined enemy. The difference [between the two] is substantial: while the struggle as the creation of life requires efforts of solidarity and reciprocity among human beings, the struggle as the logic of confrontation assumes the creation of a mechanism specializing in destruction.”<sup>19</sup> Zibechi believes that the militarist orientation is corrosive for social movements, given that it reconstructs all the forms of exploitation and domination against which the emancipatory movement fights. He is inspired by the indigenous movement, by the experiences of the Zapatista Army (which Zibechi denies is an army in the traditional sense), and the Movimiento Armado Quintín Lame in southern Colombia. He affirms that “that which really changes the world is learning to live in another way, in a communitarian way.... Fraternity is the key to social change, not war, not even the class war. Fraternity, the little sister of threefold motif of the French Revolution, clears the way for equality and liberty.”<sup>20</sup>

The following quote summarizes in some sense the conclusions of this work: “The state cannot be a tool for the emancipation since one cannot structure a society of non-power relations by means of the conquest of power. Once the logic of power is adopted, the struggle against power is already lost.”<sup>21</sup> Likewise, “...the past century puts in relief the impossibility of advancing from power to a new society. The state cannot be used to transform the world. The role that we attribute to it should be revised.”<sup>22</sup> From an anarchist perspective, there is the temptation to point out that this was said by the founders of the anarchist tradition, in the same terms, more than one hundred years ago and that since then this knowledge has formed an essential part of libertarian practice. In any case, it is highly auspicious that a great part of the Left is making this critique of Leninism, and to see them advocating the construction of horizontal, autonomous, and complex organizations in which power is socialized, like any other human necessity.

There is a lot superficial journalism about the movements analyzed in the texts reviewed here as well as a proliferation of photographs and statements without any originality. For this reason, the appearance of these books is especially gratifying, the one more attentive to the general movement of society and framed in the crisis of Latin America as a whole and the other more focused on the analysis of the



“concrete situation” and the inner experience of these new social movements. Both of these works are indispensable for understanding the crossroads at which Argentina presently finds itself.

Translated from Spanish by Chuck Morse.

## Endnotes

1. Hijos por la Identidad, la Justicia, contra el Olvido y el Silencio—Children for Identity, Justice, Against Forgetting and Silence.
2. Colectivo Situaciones and MTD de Solano, *Hipótesis 891. Más allá de los piquetes* (Buenos Aires: De Mano en Mano, 2002), 17. Regarding the idea of te activist theorist (militante investigador) that shapes the activity of Colectivo Situaciones, see , About this idea of Miguel Benasayag y Diego Sztulwark, *Política y Situación. De la potencia al Contrapoder* (Buenos Aires: De Mano en Mano, 2000).
3. Ibid., 28.
4. Ibid., 30.
5. Ibid., 31.
6. Ibid., 33.
7. Ibid., 34.
8. Comprised of unions, Left political parties, etc.
9. The Congreso (later Central) de los Trabajadores Argentinos, which was created in opposition to the monolithic and bureaucratic Confederación General del Trabajo, had its base among state workers and teachers (who continue being its most important sector).
10. Raúl Zibechi, *Genealogía de la revuelta. Argentina: la sociedad en movimiento* (Montevideo-La Plata-Buenos Aires: Nordan-Letra Libre, 2003), 75.
11. The CTA's Federación de Tierra y Vivienda groups people from settlements on state lands, shanty towns, and neighborhood collectives of the unemployed, etc.
12. Raúl Zibechi, *Genealogía de la revuelta. Argentina: la sociedad en movimiento*, 76
13. Which is expressly condemned by or Zibechi in other parts of the this book.
14. In fact, they are still seen in this way by many Left political organizations.
15. See Rebecca DeWitt, “Poststructuralist Anarchism: An Interview with Todd May,” *Perspectives on Anarchist Theory* Vol. 4, No. 2, Fall, 2000, <http://perspectives.anarchist-studies.org/8may.htm>
16. Economist and director of the Instituto de Estudios del CTA.
17. In Isabel Rauber, *Profetas del cambio* (Havana: Centro de Recuperación y Difusión de la Memoria Histórica del Movimiento Popular Latinoamericano, 1997)
18. Raúl Zibechi, *Genealogía de la revuelta. Argentina: la sociedad en movimiento*, 77.
19. Ibid., 15.
20. Ibid., 18.
21. John Holloway, *Cambiar el mundo sin tomar el poder* (Buenos Aires: Herramienta, 2002), 216.
22. Raúl Zibechi, *Genealogía de la revuelta. Argentina: la sociedad en movimiento* (Montevideo-La Plata-Buenos Aires: Nordan-Letra Libre, 2003), 202.

Notes continued from page 20

12. Doug Henwood cited in Charlie Bertsch, “Interview with Doug Henwood,” in *The Anti-Capitalism Reader: Imagining a Geography of Opposition*, ed. Joel Schalit (New York: Akashic Books, 2002), 161.
13. John Brady, “The Public Sphere in the Era of Anti-Capitalism,” in *The Anti-Capitalism Reader: Imagining a Geography of Opposition*, ed. Joel Schalit (New York: Akashic Books, 2002), 60.
14. Doug Henwood, “Interview with Slavoj Zizek,” in *The Anti-Capitalism Reader: Imagining a Geography of Opposition*, ed. Joel Schalit (New York: Akashic Books, 2002), 45.
15. Doug Henwood cited in Charlie Bertsch, “Interview with Doug Henwood,” in *The Anti-Capitalism Reader: Imagining a Geography of Opposition*, ed. Joel Schalit (New York: Akashic Books, 2002), 161.
16. Slavoj Zizek cited in Doug Henwood, “Interview with Slavoj Zizek,” in *The Anti-Capitalism Reader: Imagining a Geography of Opposition*, ed. Joel Schalit (New York: Akashic Books, 2002), 72.
17. Ibid., 73.
18. For example, McNally writes “and so, as bondage became associated with Africans in eighteenth-century America, the concept of race was created.” David McNally, *Another World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2002), 113.
19. David McNally, *Another World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism*, 235.
20. Ibid., 249.
21. Eric Rofes, introduction to *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era of Globalization*, ed. Benjamin Shepard and Ronald Hayduk (New York: Verso, 2002), X.
22. Leslie Kaufman, “A short history of radical renewal,” in *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era of Globalization*, ed. Benjamin Shepard and Ronald Hayduk (New York: Verso, 2002), 40.
23. Starhawk, “How we really shut down the WTO,” in *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era of Globalization*, ed. Benjamin Shepard and Ronald Hayduk (New York: Verso, 2002), 53.

# Toward an American Revolutionary Praxis

by Geert Dhondt

*[O]f all struggles in which a popular victory would fatally weaken U.S. Capitalism, the fight against White Supremacy is the one with the greatest chance of success. — Noel Ignatiev<sup>1</sup>*

One hundred years ago, W.E.B. DuBois wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk* that “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.” How has this analysis from one

of this nation’s greatest revolutionary intellectuals influenced American anarchism? Not much, I guess. Alexander Berkman and Emma Goldman, for example, did not write much on the “Negro Question,” nor did many of their contemporaries in the heyday of the anarchist movement. While the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) were a welcome exception to this phenomenon, most of the revolutionary proletariat did not pay much attention to the color line. The famous Eugene V. Debs even stated that revolutionary politics was “white men’s business.” In the late 19th century and early 20th century, much of the revolutionary proletariat—in which the anarchist movement was based—was from Europe or of European decent and their outlook and experiences reflected these origins. The European immigrants brought with them anarchism and other revolutionary traditions from Europe, but—of course—this here is not Europe; the United States, while part of this global capitalist system, has its own peculiar development, with its own fault lines and its own revolutionary heritage, and U.S. anarchists are frequently much less familiar with it than with the European revolutionary tradition. Anarchists in the United States tend to know more about Russia’s Makhnovist movement or the details of the Spanish Civil War than about—for example—the Abolitionist Movement, the Reconstruction era, or the Civil Rights Movement. The New Abolitionists, with their Journal *Race Traitor*, are a refreshing exception to this. They are looking not to the European revolutionary legacy to imagine the possibility of social revolution in this country, but instead look at America’s own revolutionary tradition, to people such as the Abolitionists and the Wobblies, to try figure out a strategy for revolution in the belly of the beast.

New Abolitionist politics have had an increasing influence on the anarchists in the United States. The politics were present in the now defunct Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation,<sup>2</sup> they have influenced the new revolutionary group that is forming around the Bring the Ruckus Draft Proposal<sup>3</sup> and they have had some influence

*How the Irish Became White*

By Noel Ignatiev

New York: Routledge, 1995

*Race Traitor*

By Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey (editors)

New York: Routledge, 1996

*The Lesson of The Hour: Wendell Phillips on Abolition and Strategy*

By Noel Ignatiev (editor)

Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2001.

in the Northeastern Federation of Anarcho-Communists. This book review will look at three books by New Abolitionist Noel Ignatiev.

Noel Ignatiev—who has called himself an anarchist among Marxists, and a Marxist among anarchists—has been involved with revolutionary politics since the 1950s. He was involved with man movements, among them the Civil Rights movement, the

Sixties movements, the Sojourner Truth Organization, and (briefly) with Love and Rage. After nearly a half-a-century of agitation and writing,<sup>4</sup> his ideas are finally available in book form.

## *How the Irish Became White* (1995)

*Probably the most interesting history book of 1995... — Nell Irvin Painter, Historian<sup>5</sup>*

*In the historical literature on race relations, there is much that safely can be ignored. However, from time to time a study comes along that truly can be called path-breaking, seminal, essential, a must read. How the Irish Became White is such a study. Noel Ignatiev has produced that rare work of historical scholarship that, while firmly grounded in past events, also speaks forcefully to current concerns. — John Bracey, W.E.B. DuBois Department of Afro-American Studies, University of Massachusetts, Amherst<sup>6</sup>*

After spending many years working and organizing in the factories in the Midwest, Noel Ignatiev—lacking a bachelor degree—went to graduate school to study History at Harvard; *How the Irish Became White* was the result. This book is one of the many great books on “Whiteness” studies that came out in the 1990s. These books—including *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic* (Alexander Saxton), *Wages of Whiteness* (David Roediger) and *The Invention of the White Race* (Ted Allen)—target the New Left Labor Historians, such as David Montgomery, Herbert Gutman, and Eric Arnesen.<sup>7</sup> While these historians focus on the experience of the daily lives of ordinary people, they get race wrong, downplay racism, or overlook racism. These books, following in the footsteps of DuBois’s *Black Reconstruction*, try to make a political intervention. While changing the world is what is important, your strategies spring from your understanding of how the world works, and these books and historical controversies are important contributions to the development of an American revolutionary praxis. An American revolutionary

praxis needs to recognize the pivotal role that racialized slavery played in the formation of the working class in this nation, and this praxis needs to recognize what W.E.B. DuBois and C.L.R. James<sup>8</sup> recognized long ago—the centrality of the struggle against white supremacy in the fight for a new and free society.

*How the Irish Became White*, divided in six chapters, focuses on how the Irish went from being part of an oppressed race in Ireland to being members of the oppressing race in the United States in the 19th century. The Irish Catholics were victims of a type of discrimination in Ireland which was analogous to what we consider racial discrimination in the United States. Through the story of a revolutionary of Irish stock, John Binns, Ignatiev shows how Binns transforms from being an Irish revolutionary militant on one side of the ocean to fighting with the Irish on this side of the puddle to establish citizenship in the White Republic. At the same time, in 1841, Daniel O'Connell—an important and influential political leader of the Irish liberation struggle—wrote an appeal to the Irish in America to join with the Abolitionists to overthrow slavery and to treat the Negro as their brother. The racially oppressed Irish in Ireland and the Abolitionists linked their struggles to overturn racial subjugation in both places. The Irish in America, though, rejected this and chose to reject their love for Ireland, and instead fought to gain access to the privileges of the white club in their new White Republic.

The Irish did not automatically become a part of the white club just because they had white skin. They had to earn it. Malcolm X describes in his autobiography how he was witnessing European immigrants getting off the plane and he then said, "Pretty little children. Soon they're going to learn their first English word: nigger."<sup>9</sup> The Irish had to earn membership in the white club and thus gain access to the material benefits and the public and psychological wages of whiteness by distancing themselves from Blacks. The Irish—or the white Negroes, as they were called—had to create barriers and separate themselves from the black population with whom they lived in the ghettos. They also had to fight to overcome the resistance from members of the white club and demand their own civil rights from the Protestant elite. The Irish forced themselves into the White Republic—insisting that they deserved the rights of citizenship enjoyed by whites—by joining in the subjugation of Blacks.

Ignatiev details this struggle for Irish membership in the white race; he describes how the Irish used the riot, the Democratic Party, the labor unions, and the church to transform themselves from "white Negroes" to respectable citizens. One example of this, as portrayed in the recent

popular fictional film, *Gangs of New York*, were the draft riots in New York City in July, 1863. These riots, which were initiated by the unfair practices of the Civil War draft, lasted a week and in the process the Irish turned against the Black population of New York, killing up to 1,000 of them, while they raised the Confederate Flag and fought to exclude Blacks from civil service and other jobs that the Irish and Blacks both held. The Irish rioted not just against the unfair drafting practices of the bourgeoisie but also to defend and define the White Republic. They wanted a monopoly on certain jobs; they did not want the war to turn into a war against slavery; and they were in the process fighting to gain entrance into the white club and not for a racially free republic. The Irish used the riot to distance themselves from the Black population and thus helped shape a White Republic.<sup>10</sup>

*How the Irish Became White* ends in 1877 with the end of the Reconstruction, when the new color line that the Irish helped define was marked. "If the abolition of slavery had called into question the meaning of whiteness, the overthrow of Reconstruction marked the restoration of the color line on a new basis. No longer did it coincide with the distinction between freedom and slavery; it now came to correspond to the distinction between free, wage labor and unfree, semi-feudal labor, and between those who had access to political power and those who did not."<sup>11</sup>

This story of the Irish is a powerful one. Noel Ignatiev writes that "no one gave a damn for the poor Irish. Even the downtrodden black people had Quakers and abolitionists to bring their plight to public attention (as well as the ability to tell their own stories effectively), but there is no Irish-American counterpart of the various Philadelphia studies on the condition of free colored people."<sup>12</sup> Ignatiev goes on to offer a possible explanation, "perhaps it reflects a perception that the striving of the Negro for full freedom carried within itself a vision of a new world for everyone, while the assimilation of the Irish into white America meant merely more of the same."<sup>13</sup>

In the same spirit, C.L.R. James, when he was looking for the new society in the present—a society where self-organization would replace bureaucracy—wrote that the Afro-American people were the most self-organized people anywhere. James also wrote that the task of the revolutionary was to study, observe, and write down what the workers are doing since they are already creating the new society. James advised that the daily ways in which the worker creates the new society should be recorded in a paper. To a certain degree Noel Ignatiev, John Garvey, and others have been publishing a journal, *Race Traitor*, that has detailed how people are unmaking the white race.

### *Race Traitor* (1996)

...the most visionary, courageous journal in America. — Cornel West<sup>14</sup>

...among the strongest, funniest and most politically charged critiques of whiteness to appear since slave storytellers spun out the 'Master and John' tales. — David Roediger<sup>15</sup>

While *How the Irish Became White* was a study of how a group of non-white people became white, *Race Traitor* is about the very opposite of that. It is about how people who think of themselves as white might become non-white, and thus, as Malcolm X wrote, human.<sup>16</sup> *Race Traitor: Journal of New Abolitionism* is a journal that first appeared in 1993 and the book is a "best of" collection of articles from the first few years. The book is divided into six chapters and defines new abolitionism; describes how white people, individually and collectively, challenge the white race; discusses how race has changed over the years; analyzes current events and popular culture from a new abolitionist perspective; and contributes to the development of a new revolutionary praxis in the American context.

"[T]he key to fundamental change in the US is to challenge the system of race privilege that embraces all whites, including the most downtrodden."<sup>17</sup> The goal is not just to strive for equality of opportunity within the existing society, but to focus on race privilege, on the white race, as a strategy for revolution. New abolitionism is something different from what is usually defined as anti-racism. New abolitionism strives to challenge the institutions that reproduce race as a social category. New abolitionism seeks to abolish the white race. "The white race is a historically constructed social formation—historically constructed because (like royalty) it is a product of some people's responses to historical circumstances; a social formation because it is a fact of society corresponding to no classification recognized by natural science."<sup>18</sup> Ignatiev and Garvey explain that "the white race consists of those who partake of the privileges of the white skin in this society. Its most wretched members share a status higher, in certain respects, than the most exalted persons excluded from it, in return for which they give their support to the system that degrades them."<sup>19</sup> To further explain what new abolitionists mean by the white race, the editors use the analogy of a country club to describe how race functions. "The white race is a club that enrolls certain people at birth, without their consent, and brings them up according to its rules. For the most part the members go through life accepting the benefits of membership, without thinking about the costs." *Race Traitor's* goal is "to dissolve the club, to break it apart, to explode it."<sup>20</sup>

Why would this make any sense at all? Race is a historically constructed political category, but so is gender and even class for that matter. One can argue that gender or class exists in such a way that those categories also cut across all others and that members assigned unwillingly to the dominant gender at birth also place these gender interests above class and race or any other interests they might hold. Why focus on race? And why would this focus be a strategy for revolution? To answer this it will be useful to look at the particular way that race developed in the United States.

When the first pilgrims settled in Virginia race as we know it now did not yet exist. As in Ted Allen's book title, the white race had to be invented. Why?

The rulers in colonial America had a problem. After they stole and cleared the land of the American Indian people, backbreaking work needed to be done to turn the land into arable pastures. They were not going to do this work themselves, so where were they going to get the labor to do this? They brought in bound labor from Europe and Africa. The indentured servants would become free after a period of perhaps seven years. After these seven years they usually did not become wage-labor—since this was very rare at that time—but instead became independent commodity producers or farmers. Black and white indentured servants toiled together, lived together, escaped together, and revolted together. Thus the rulers of 17th century Virginia had a major problem in addition to the labor shortage that characterized economic life in the colonies. Who was going to police the laborers in a place where land was up for grabs? It became necessary to enlist one part of the workers to police the other part. Toward the end of the 17th century, Virginia started to pass a series of laws to drive a wedge between African and European decedents—laws such as those forbidding marriage between Europeans and Africans. By 1705, Virginia's rulers had driven the wedge between Black and white wide enough to give every white bond laborer a musket after they finished their term of indenture—while only twenty-five years previously Virginia was plagued by servile revolts. The rulers created race by drawing discriminatory lines against Africans and Indians. The white race was the product of political choices. Race did not exist—it had to be invented to divide the masses and to police the labor force. Racialized slavery solved both of colonial Virginia's major problems: it solved the labor shortage and created docile workers. The invention of the white race started the way in which special privileges were granted to one part of the labor force, including the extension of democratic rights to the white population.<sup>21</sup>

Capitalism is a system that recognizes nothing but individuals acting independently in an impersonal market and thus is colorblind. It can exist without race, as it does in other places



in the world. However, the problem for us today in the United States is that capitalism developed hand in hand with white supremacy; working class formation and the concept of the white race developed simultaneously and thus in a sense created a white and a non-white working class.<sup>22</sup> While capitalism everywhere develops its own gravediggers, in the US race developed as a system of social control, to control the internal contradictions inherent in capitalism. Race in the US then functions much as social democracy does in Europe; both make exploitation more tolerable for certain segments of the working class. The white race is central to understanding the functioning and history of U.S. capitalism and to understanding the social movements that struggled against exploitation.

Each and every time the white race was challenged by social movements—as it was by the abolitionists in the 19th century and by the civil rights movement in the 20th century—this struggle opened up opportunities for revolution by temporarily breaking down the system of social control. Today, the criminal justice system has inherited this role in the capitalist society from slavery and Jim Crow.<sup>23</sup>

While the *Race Traitor* anthology offers interesting personal stories of how certain individuals temporarily step outside the white race, these acts by themselves don't threaten the institutions—such as schools, the criminal justice system, the labor market, and hospitals—that perpetuate white supremacy in our society. Only collective action as demonstrated by the abolitionist movement in the 19th century and the civil rights movement of the 20th century will threaten the system of social control and create the space for revolution.

Nevertheless, one very interesting and fascinating story in the anthology is the one of Joel Gilbert. Gilbert grew up alienated from society and was attracted to the neo-Nazi movement in the Midwest. Later, Gilbert was exposed to the Black power movement and became a left wing revolutionary. Now Gilbert wants to “destroy this so-called white society. I don't want any more kids to grow up like I did. I don't want to see psychiatry being used to hurt people. I don't want to see cops beating down anybody, black or white. I don't want to see families destroyed the way mine was. The kid this society gave birth to and tried to socialize has rebelled.”<sup>24</sup>

There are also many other outstanding pieces in the anthology, including a critique of multicultural education, a great analysis of the Rodney King riots and of police killings, Lorenzo Komboa Ervin's account of his experience behind prison walls, and many other articles that together play an important part in the creation of an American revolutionary praxis.

The *Race Traitor* project follows C.L.R. James in recognizing the importance of the struggle against white supremacy and the centrality of this fight in the United States in the struggle for human liberation. James wrote in *Facing Reality* that every country “has many national political issues peculiar to it, some of them rooted deep in the national historical development.”<sup>25</sup> One task of the revolutionary is to bring these issues to the forefront. Another is to show how this peculiar history has been challenged in the past. Noel Ignatiev's collection of the speeches of Wendell Phillips shows that we can learn much from the radical abolitionists about revolution today.

### ***The Lesson of The Hour: Wendell Phillips on Abolition and Strategy* (2001)**

*By the South, I mean a principle, and not a locality. I mean an element which cannot tolerate free speech, and punishes it with stake. I mean the aristocracy of the skin, which considers the Declaration of Independence a sham, and democracy a snare—which believes that one-third of the race is born booted and spurred, and the other two-thirds already saddled for that ride. I mean the intellectual, social, aristocratic, South—the thing that manifests itself by barbarism and the bowie-knife, by bullying and lynch-law, by ignorance and disease. That South is to be annihilated. This Country will never know peace nor union until the South (using the words in the sense I have described) is annihilated, and the North is spread over it. — Wendell Phillips<sup>26</sup>*

*For “South” read “the white race,” and for “locality” read “physical type,” and you will have the outlook of the new abolitionism, perfectly stated. — Noel Ignatiev<sup>27</sup>*

The collected speeches of Wendell Phillips are very powerful. Included among others are “The Philosophy of the Abolitionist Movement,” “The Lesson of the Hour,” and “Disunion.” These speeches, along with five others, are prefaced by a long and excellent introduction by Noel Ignatiev.

The introduction is at once a short history of the radical abolitionist movement and an analysis of how the abolitionists created a crisis and a dual power situation that yielded possibilities for a social revolution in the U.S.. Historians have argued that the period after the Civil War is the closest the U.S. ever came to a social revolution. Ignatiev quotes C.L.R. James to show how the abolitionists were revolutionaries who sought “to tear up by the roots the foundation of the Southern economy and society, wreck Northern commerce, and disrupt the Union irretrievably...They renounced all traditional politics...They openly hoped for the defeat of their own country in the Mexican War...They preached and practiced Negro equality. They endorsed and fought for the equality of women...”<sup>28</sup>

At the outbreak of the Civil War, Phillips delivered a passionate speech in which he argued for the break up of the Union and stated that for all of his grown-up years he had been "devoted to creating just such a crisis as that which is now upon us."<sup>29</sup> This crisis opened up space in the struggle for human liberation. At the outbreak of the war, the task for the abolitionists was to transform the war for the Union into a war against slavery.

Previously, after John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry in 1859, Phillips had given a powerful speech in his defense, entitled "The Lesson of the Hour." Phillips stated, "I think the lesson of the hour is insurrection. Insurrection of thought always precedes insurrection of arms. The last twenty years have been insurrection of thought."<sup>30</sup> Later in the speech he explains the power of John Brown. "Virginia did not tremble at an old gray-headed man at Harpers Ferry; they trembled at a John Brown in every man's own conscience."<sup>31</sup>

In 1853, Phillips gave a speech that called for "Immediate, Unconditional Emancipation." In "The Philosophy of the Abolition Movement," Phillips argues for revolutionary politics. "The cause is not ours, so that we might, rightfully, postpone or put in peril the victory by moderating our demands, stifling our convictions, or filling down our rebukes, to gratify any sickly taste of our own, or to spare the delicate nerves of our neighbor." And he continues, "The press, the pulpit, the wealth, the literature, the prejudices, the political arrangements, the present self-interest of the country, are all against us." Thus, "he who cannot be reasoned out of his prejudices must be laughed out of them; he who cannot be argued out of his selfishness must be shamed out of it by the mirror of his hateful self held up relentlessly before his eyes."<sup>32</sup> Wendell Phillips was not seeking to win over others by talking, reasoning or arguing with them, but instead by drawing lines, by agitating to change the boundaries of the debate.<sup>33</sup>

Anarchists are more part of a scene than part of a revolutionary social movement. The anarchist scene is plagued by disorganization and lack of analysis, vision, and strategy. Even those who are organized and serious revolutionaries often draw on European anarchist roots to create a revolutionary praxis at home. A serious reflection on the United States' own historical development and revolutionary tradition will be necessary if we are going to get out of our scene and develop a serious movement that will be part of the struggle for a free society. *How the Irish Became White*, *Race Traitor*, and *The Lesson of the Hour* are essential contributions to the creation of this American revolutionary praxis. I hope that these three accessible and fast-reading books will be widely read and hotly debated by American anarchists and other revolutionaries.

## Endnotes

1. Noel Ignatiev, "The White Blindspot" (1976) cited in Bring the Ruckus reading packet for the November 2002 meeting in Phoenix, AZ.
2. *A New World in Our Hearts*, ed. Roy San Filippo (Oakland: AK Press, 2003).
3. See <http://www.agitatorindex.org>
4. See "The White Blindspot" (1966, from Bring the Ruckus meeting reading packet) and *An Introduction to the United States: An Autonomist Political History* (Denver, CO: Final Conflict, 1978).
5. Nell Irvin Painter in *The Washington Post*, cited on back cover of Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995).
6. John Bracey cited in Danny Postel, "Interview with Noel Ignatiev," *Z Magazine*, <http://www.zmag.org>.
7. See David Montgomery, *Citizen Worker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993) and Eric Arneson, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1991).
8. See Scott McLemee and Paul LeBlanc, "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States" in *C.L.R. James and Revolutionary Marxism* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 2000) and Grace Lee, Pierre Chaulieu and J.R. Johnson, *Facing Reality: The New Society, Where to Look for It, How to Bring It Closer* (Detroit: Bewick Editions, 1958/1974).
9. Cited in Danny Postel, "Interview with Noel Ignatiev," *Z Magazine*, <http://www.zmag.org>
10. Ibid.
11. Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White*, 173.
12. Ibid., 178. Much has been written by and about the Free Blacks of Philadelphia. The autobiography of Frederick Douglass is perhaps the most famous work. Philadelphia was not only the home of many Free Blacks, but also the home of many Irish immigrants. Not that much has been written about the latter group.
13. Ibid., 178.
14. Cornel West cited on *Race Traitor* back cover, 10, Winter 1999.
15. David Roediger on back cover of *Race Traitor*, ed. John Garvey and Noel Ignatiev (New York: Routledge, 1996).
16. The full quote is from a longer passage when Malcolm X is waiting at a red light and another car pulls up and asks him, "Do you mind shaking hands with a white man? Imagine that! Just as the traffic light turned green, I told him, 'I don't mind shaking hands with human beings. Are you one?'" Cited in Joel Olsen, *Democratic Problem of the White Citizen* (Ph.D. diss.; University of Minnesota, 2001), 1. Book forthcoming: University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

*Notes continued on page 41*

# The Revolution Will Not be Engineered: Community Planning, Rationality, and Utopia

by Stephen Shukaitis

At best “community” is a word used in an uncritical or unreflective way by activists and organizers. At worst it becomes a fetishized, quasi magical term that makes everything seem more relevant and rooted in practical experience. This is quite understandable, given that “community”—or neighborhood, locality, or a number of related terms—has multiple meanings and usages in different forms of knowledge and experience. This may cause some occasional semantic dissidence, but usually this is a minor concern.

*Sustainable Communities:  
The Potential for Eco-  
Neighborhoods*

By Hugh Barton (editor)  
London: Earthscan Publications  
Ltd, 2002

*Seeing Like a State: How Certain  
Schemes to Improve the Human  
Condition Have Failed*

By James C. Scott  
New Haven, CT: Yale  
University Press, 1998

environmentally sustainable manner. Oddly enough, some of the key concepts used throughout the book (eco-villages, eco-neighborhoods, etc) are never explicitly defined and used differently by different authors. Nonetheless, an eco-neighborhood or eco-village is implicitly defined as the merging of community planning process with an ecosystem approach to environmental sustainability. An eco-neighborhood is the result of making ecological sustainability a central element of community planning and design.

While it is easy to get people to agree that it would be desirable to have stronger and more tightly knit communities (regardless of their definition of community), it is much harder to achieve anything resembling a consensus on how to achieve this. Can a better society, community, or neighborhood be planned? Or does it have to emerge through an organic process? If so, what, if any, would be the role of activists in such a process? Can the revolution be engineered, or does it have to grow? Efforts to plan a better world are linked to both acts of amazing resistance and creativity as well as mass graves and starvation when such plans become absolute and backed by state power.

This essay will explore recent plans and discussions for creating more sustainable neighborhoods taking place within the World Health Organization (*Eco-Neighborhoods*). It will also place them in the context of a critical examination of the fate of previous attempts to engineer social change (*Seeing Like a State*). I hope that this review will enrich discussions about anti-authoritarian approaches to social change and planning.

## The Potential for Eco-Neighborhoods, or “Can Ben & Jerry’s Bring You Democracy?”

The first text is a collection of essays edited by Hugh Barton, a researcher and consultant on sustainable design and planning and the executive director of the World Health Organization Center for Healthy Cities and Urban Policy. Although Barton seems to have the most dominant voice in the collection, it is a fairly diverse set of essays and brings in perspectives from architecture, permaculture design, public health, urban and community planning, environmental science, and energy policy. Its stated purpose is to go beyond “fuzzy” thinking about community planning and to formulate new ideas about how to reinvigorate local communities in an

The prime catalyst for the discussions encapsulated in the anthology is Local Agenda 21, which came out of the 1991 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. The projects and efforts described include waste reduction and recycling programs, local equitable trading schemes, neighborhood revitalization, intentional communities, and everything in between. Although the majority of the examples tend to focus on Europe (with some examples from the United States, India, Australia, and other locations), a fairly extensive listing and summary of eco-neighborhood projects around the world is also included. Although it is refreshing to see a listing of such projects, clearly such projects encompass very small portions of the world’s population, far too small to increase sustainability as much as their designers probably hoped they would. An argument against the overall feasibility of these projects—that creating ecological communities and increasing sustainability is a task better addressed at the national and international level—is raised although never fully addressed. Corresponding with that idea is the notion that the project of ecological and environmental sustainability might be better addressed separately from creating and designing communities. In other words, addressing sustainability issues would be more successful by focusing on existing situations and uses of energy and resources (rather than creating new designs).<sup>1</sup>

Even just browsing the book makes it clear that this volume contains is a good deal of information that is relevant not only to imagining ecologically sound models of community but also the practical creation and design of these communities. The given outline of the principles of sustainable design include ideas such as pre-cautionary planning and the principle of subsidiarity, which says that decisions should be made on the lowest level possible.<sup>2</sup> Similarly there is much that seems useful in what they call

an ecosystem approach to community design, which includes increasing local autonomy, increasing choice and diversity, responsiveness to culture and place, connection and integration, flexibility and adaptability, and user control.<sup>3</sup> If there is a main focus of the different views and ideas advanced, it is that achieving environmental sustainability is best done not by questioning whether or not areas should be developed, but how they are and in whose interest. However, many of the most interesting ideas are concealed in a confusing terminology. For instance, while one encountering the concept of “social capital” might wonder why everything has to be subsumed under such market-like terms, this really refers to access to networks of mutual support. Similarly, there are other obfuscating terms, such as “social polarization,” that hide the nature of what they describe (in this case the creation of stark differences in wealth, class, and social standing).

The main idea emerging in the text is that creating and invigorating communities can have very positive synergistic effects on environmental sustainability, and vice versa. From issues of energy and waste management to food production and community governance, it is refreshing to see these issues discussed (from within the NGO-government complex, no less) in a way that does not cast them as dichotomous, “either/or” concerns but as part of a complementary project. Thus much of the book concerns balancing various technical concerns against the capacity of different environments to sustain such projects, such as determining the population density necessary to support the required infrastructure without overburdening the environment.<sup>4</sup>

Although many of the projects discussed seem to have real radical potential, there are also many obvious limits. More bluntly, while interesting reformist projects are presented, that could have great benefits, the discussion is clearly limited by acceptance of the state and capitalism as given constraints. The Situationists developed one of the earliest and most incisive critiques about how the state and capitalism shape space and extend control through city planning which they identified as being “the capitalist domination of space . . . the organization of universal isolation,”<sup>5</sup> which they regarded as the very antithesis of community and belonging. For example, there is an on-going but subtle emphasis in the text on the gulf between idealistic projects and the pressures of the market. The existence of the market, however, is not something contested here, and thus there are declarations that “images of a sustainable community are seductive but run counter to market trends.”<sup>6</sup> This is the Ben & Jerry’s quandary: one can have the best of intentions and institute practices and reforms that are very positive in mediating and reducing the ecological damage caused by the market, but ultimately the inability to contest the state or capitalism leads to failure, either through co-optation or the inability to resist

market forces. Similar problems and contradictions plague cooperatives, worker collectives, and other forms of economic and direct democracy that try to survive under current conditions.

Similarly there are constraints based around the assumption that plans and desires for ecological communities are something that need the state to come into existence. Although it is mentioned that a few of the projects occur without state initiative, backing, or support (and even in contestation of it), this is not emphasized, and it is generally assumed that such projects need the backing of the state, which is described as “hold[ing] the key in moves towards sustainable development.”<sup>7</sup> These constraints generate a weird form of defeatism that seeps through some of the essays, which is evident when the decline of community and locality is discussed as though it were a natural and inevitable result of more affluent consumers choosing cars and the suburbs (thus totally neglecting the role played by the state and business in creating suburbanization and urban flight). This coupled with claims like “intensely localized democracy is something of a dream” and that the visions for eco-neighborhoods that the book discusses “can reflect pious hopes rather than economic and social reality.”<sup>8</sup>

### Hallelujah German Forestry Science! Why the State Can’t See the Forest for Just the Trees

Closely related and relevant to the idea of planning for social change and community building being constrained by the bounds of both the market and the state is *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* by Yale anthropologist James Scott. This book contains a very insightful analysis of the failure of state-based social engineering, which is perhaps especially effective because it is not written by an overtly anarchist author. Scott uses his skills of analysis to tie together and compare widely disparate projects for designing social change and planning communities, from the collectivized farms of Soviet Russia and the forced ujamaa villagizing in Tanzania, to Le Corbusier’s high modernist city planning in France and Brazil and China’s “Great Leap Forward.”

Scott’s main claim is that the state creates forms of knowledge and understanding that are suited to its own needs; its goal is to create “maps of legibility,” to rationalize and standardize social hieroglyphics into forms of knowledge that make a society knowable, manageable, and exist in an administratively convenient format.<sup>9</sup> It is the project of fixing populations and resources, the sedentation of mobile populations (pastoralists, serfs, runaway slaves, nomads, etc), and the administration of the social and economic order through bureaucratic processes and knowledge. The state then tries to replace local forms, methods, and practices (which reflect



the needs and peculiarities of their place of origin) with standardized practices and forms that are essential to its functioning.<sup>10</sup>

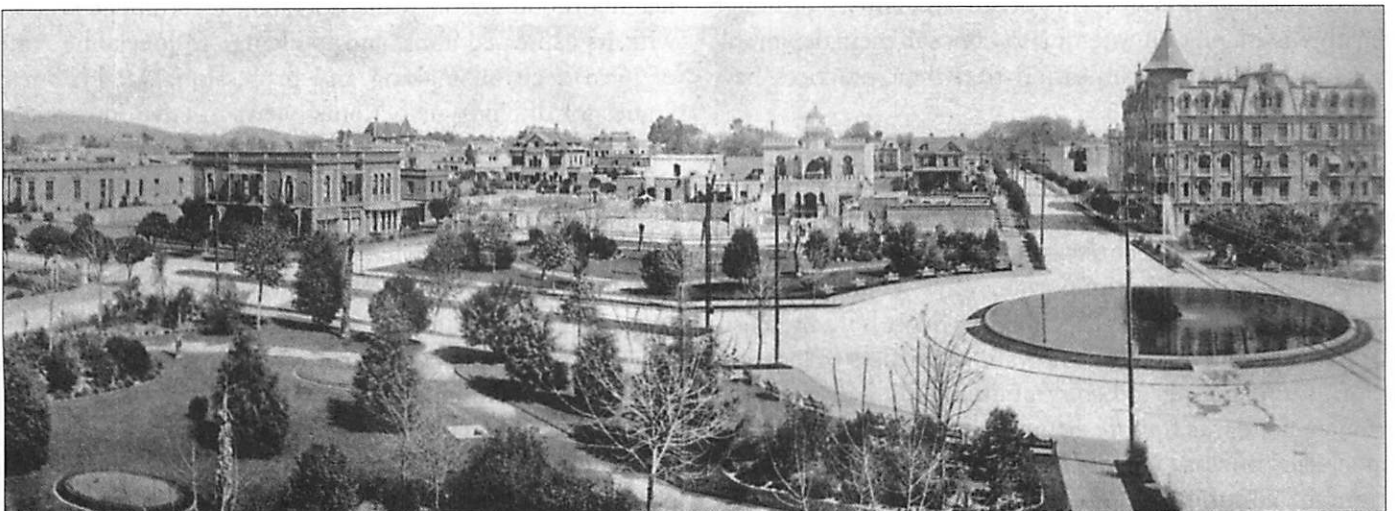
To engage in this process of administration and control, the state generates corresponding forms of technical and administrative knowledge, which Scott describes as *techne*, or analytical, technical, universal, scientific forms of knowledge that are “self-characteristic, above all, of self-contained systems of reasoning in which the findings may be logically derived from the initial assumptions.”<sup>11</sup> Thus the idea of seeing like a state, the process of focusing the forms of knowledge and practice that designate value according to the utilitarian needs of the state, namely economic gain and extraction. Charles Tilly argues that the state itself emerged through such a process, where the need of the lord to extract wealth and resources created processes and administrative capacities that developed beyond their original intent.<sup>12</sup> These processes would include everything from the relatively benign (compiling labor, environmental, and health data) to the more blatantly egregious forms (counterintelligence, urban planning as social control, etc).

As an example of the limits of *techne*, German forestry science developed methods for growing trees in neatly ordered rows that greatly benefited extraction. However, the imposed order lead to a decrease in plant, animal, and insect diversity and the lack of decaying materials on the forest floor, all of which lead to a decrease in the availability of critical nutrients and minerals for the soil and thus ultimately the decline of the forest.<sup>13</sup> Similar examples include the planning of Soviet collective farms from a hotel room in Chicago (thus totally ignoring all the local social and environmental conditions where these farms were to be built) or the gigantism of monocrop agriculture that fails to replenish soil nutrients or stop erosion, but yields visually ordered fields that are easily harvested.

The underlying problem with such plans is that they are united by their reliance upon *techne*, instead of the local forms of knowledge and practice—which Scott calls *mētis*—that most often underlie and hold together communities and local systems of production. *Mētis*, an idea connected to Kropotkin’s conception of mutuality, typically translates as “cunning”; it “represents a wide variety of practical skills and acquired intelligence in responding to a constantly changing natural and human environment . . . [it] resists simplification into deductive principles which can be successfully transmitted through book learning, because the environments in which it is exercised are so complex and non-repeatable that formal procedures of rational decision making are impossible to apply.”<sup>14</sup> Scott argues that *mētis* represents informal customs and techniques that can’t be codified, but are essential in the process of sustaining the lives of communities and often support formal forms of knowledge.<sup>15</sup>

Scott describes how the functioning of the modern state is predicated upon these forms of legibility, which are intimately involved in large scale social engineering projects and ultimately responsible for their failure. The characteristics that unite such projects, from the visually ordered but untenable German forests to the dismal failures of Soviet collective farms, are:

1. the administrative ordering of nature and society
2. a high modernist ideology . . . [a] muscle bound version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress . . . and the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws
3. [an] authoritarian state able and willing to use the full weight of its coercive power to bring these high modernist designs into being
4. prostrate civil society that lacks the capacity to resist these plans<sup>16</sup>



It is this combination of authoritarian power and the belief in the total correctness of technical planning that combine to create a unified space of control, a regime of power and submission administered through an ordering of space. The state needs a trained intelligentsia (or vanguard party) to develop and use these forms of technocratic knowledge that are integral to its functioning. Although Scott focuses his critique on relatively recent states and development schemes, many of the characteristics he observes could be applied to ancient and modern empires alike. The difference between such time periods, however, would seem to be that it has not been until the past several hundred years that the social sciences have expanded to the point that the knowledge and information generated by them has become useful to the state in its administrative planning.

### Towards Anti-Authoritarian Community Planning Policies?

*"Any attempt to completely plan a village, a city, or for that matter a language is certain to run afoul of the same social reality. A village, a city, or a language, is the jointly created, partly unintended product of many, many hands. To the degree that authorities insist on replacing this ineffably complex web of activity with formal rules and regulations, they are certain to disrupt the web in ways they cannot possibly foresee."*<sup>17</sup>

James Scott's critique of the failures of statist plans and schemes for building community and the ideas put forward about creating eco-neighborhoods raise interesting questions and quandaries for radicals interested in creating new communities and reinvigorating existing ones. The reality that ideas and plans for building eco-neighborhoods and communities have moved from activists and organizers to the discourse of more institutionalized NGOs and the World Health Organization in ways show the success that environmental movements have had over the past thirty years. Now corporate, business, and government interests are prone to frame their actions in terms of sustainability,<sup>18</sup> although often this is merely an attempt to conceal their deplorable actions rather than an indication that their practices have really changed.

So while plans for developing eco-neighborhoods and communities are being putting forth by those who could be aptly described as the technical-intelligentsia class, the ideas discussed differ in several important ways. While the forms of technocratic knowledge described by Scott hold pretenses to being universal, objective, and valid regardless of location, the forms of planning and community building discussed by Barton et al are much more attuned to creating an inclusive, democratic process. Nevertheless, when looking at their notions of community and neighborhood planning, the

dynamic of technical knowledge and its administration is still troubling from an anti-authoritarian view. Even if the citizens of a locality get to vote occasionally on plans being put forth, there still exists a profoundly anti-democratic dynamic in the nature of technical planning. And the ideas being put forth are clearly constrained by the ideological and practical constraints implied by the accepting of the state and the market and the implicit (and occasionally explicit) argument that people don't want to manage their own community's affairs.

In *The Anti-Politics Machine* James Ferguson argues that development schemes require a cadre of policy experts who evaluate and discuss projects according to the pragmatic and technical criteria inherent to their discipline in a way that removes such issues from the sphere of politics. Through this process development and community planning is "depoliticized:" removed from the realm of public debate. The evaluation of plans is done on the basis of technical criteria created by experts working on the subject.<sup>19</sup> Under these terms of debate one can criticize specific aspects of a plan but will remain trapped within the discourse created by these forms of knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

Ultimately, while looking at the history of how state based plans for social engineering elucidate the inherent failure of such strategies, the ideas put forth in *Eco-Neighborhoods* in many ways overlap with Scott in terms of taking steps to avoid the more egregious analytical arrogance that has plagued many plans for social change and community building. In other words, today's community planners are aware that they cannot be cloistered bureaucrats with maps and charts that shape the world without having at least some sort of process where the community can have some input into this process, even if such ends up usually being more a promise than a lived reality. Barton concludes that it is necessary to place emphasis on the planning process rather than a product, to empower local communities through neighborhood action plans, to catch government policy up with its expressed aims, and to change to prevailing culture of local decision making and professionals.<sup>21</sup> He further argues for ditching reductionist views of environmental and community planning and, instead, emphasizing quality of life rather than quantitative measures: to use of a "holistic, egalitarian, inclusive set of values and conceptual models."<sup>22</sup> Similarly Scott, somewhat cautiously develops several rules of thumb that he suggests should temper planning efforts, suggests taking small steps, favoring plans which are reversible if necessary, to plan for surprises, and to plan for human inventiveness and creativity.<sup>23</sup>

From these ideas one can draw several conclusions. One possible response is that Scott's analysis would lead one to

reconsider and improve the “optics of power . . . Like a religious faith, the visual codification [that] was almost impervious to criticism or dissenting evidence”<sup>24</sup> by incorporating forms of local knowledge and practice into state planning. That seems to be the type of direction followed by *Sustainable Communities*. Alternately one could conclude such proves that revolutionary social change is impossible, and local knowledge and practices are best incorporated into the market (the “Milton Friedman reading” of the text). Both conclusions are dissatisfying at some level and point to a possible third option, which could be tentatively identified as reconstituting the revolutionary project(s) of utopian social change and planning by extending the logic and nature of local knowledge and practice through a democratic community building process. This would be the line of thought that connects mētis and mutuality—and provides a useful avenue for thinking about the utopian framework outside of the scope of power Scott discusses.

And that is the challenge for anti-authoritarians and radicals who are interested in building local communities and neighborhoods. Sociologists like Alain Touraine may claim that the difference between the “social left” and the “ultra left” is that those further on the left “speak of power and domination in terms that leave no room for autonomous action,”<sup>25</sup> but it is the task of those who realize that one’s means must be consonant with one’s ends to find and devise ways for communities to collectively participate in the management and control of their own area, without the impingement of a technical or elite class. Whether this would be through a process similar to the participatory budgeting in Brazil or something new remains to be seen. But, an anti-authoritarian community planning policy would be far from what is now understood as policy, which is really the negation of democracy through dominance of technical knowledge and state planning. It would be what David Graeber describes as “low theory” or “a way of grappling with those real immediate questions that emerge from a transformative project.”<sup>26</sup> It would be the practical realization of freedom itself.

## Endnotes

1. *Sustainable Communities: The Potential for Eco-Neighborhoods*. Ed. Hugh Barton (London: Earthscan Publications Ltd, 2002), 20-28.
2. *Ibid.*, 7.
3. *Ibid.*, 89-90.
4. *Ibid.*, 29, 11-113.
5. Atila Kotanyi and Raoul Vaneigem, “Elementary Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism,” *The Situationist International Anthology*, Ed/Trans Ken Knabb (Berkeley, CA: Bureau of Public Secrets, 1981), 65-67.
6. *Sustainable Communities*, 12.
7. *Ibid.*, 251.
8. *Ibid.*, 128, 15.
9. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 2-3.
10. Russian sociologist and anarchist Pitirim Sorokin describes a similar process with the emergence of a standardized form of measuring time and dates as being driven by the demands of engaging in commerce and exchanged in a uniform and thus more easily coordinated environment. See *Sociocultural causality, space, time* (New York: Russel & Russel Inc., 1964), 147-166.
11. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 320.
12. Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States AD 990-1990* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, Inc., 1996)
13. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 20.
14. *Ibid.*, 313-316.
15. Jacques Godbout makes a similar argument for the role of the gift: that it cannot be codified or defined, but yet is a force that supports and is integral to the functioning of the social order even as its existence and importance is denied by that order. See *The World of the Gift* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1998).
16. James Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 4-5.
17. *Ibid.*, 256.
18. Some examples of this would include the World Summit on Sustainable Design, or any of the oil companies (BP, Shell, etc) who keep hawking their displays of “responsible corporate citizenship” or “environmental responsibility.” Ironically, many times more is spent on the advertising of these measures than the actual plans for environmental improvement discussed.
19. James Ferguson. *The Anti-Politics Machine: “Development,” Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minneapolis Press, 1994)
20. Eric Laursen, *Plundering the People’s Pension: The Politics of Social Security Since 1980* (Forthcoming, 2004), 16.
21. *Eco-Neighborhoods*, 246.
22. *Ibid.*, 251.
23. James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 345.
24. *Ibid.*, 253.
25. Alain Touraine. *Beyond Neoliberalism*. Trans. David Macey (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001), 77.
26. David Graeber. *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology* (Prickly Paradigm Press, Forthcoming 2004), 3.

# Participatory Economics: A Theoretical Alternative to Capitalism

by Geert Dhondt

*[We seek] a condition of society in which there should be neither rich nor poor, neither master nor master's man, neither idle nor overworked, neither brain-sick workers, nor heartsick hand workers, in a world, in which all would be living in equality of condition and would manage their affairs unwastefully, and with the full consciousness that harm to one would mean harm to all—the realization at last of the meaning of the word commonwealth. — William Morris<sup>1</sup>*

*Anarchism is a definite intellectual current of social thought, whose adherents advocate the abolition of economic monopolies and of all political and social coercive institutions within society. In place of the capitalist economic order, Anarchists would have a free association of all productive forces based upon co-operative labor, which would have for its sole purpose the satisfying of the necessary requirements of every member of society. — Rudolf Rocker<sup>2</sup>*

Anarchist thought and practice has always criticized capitalism as a social and economic system. What has been less developed is an idea of that with which we would replace capitalism: an anarchist vision. Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel have created a well-developed theoretical system—participatory economics—that is both an alternative to capitalism and consistent with the anarchist and left communist tradition.

The anti-globalization movement, for example, articulated many strong critiques of the World Trade Organization and of global capitalism generally, but not much thought was given to how things could be structured differently. What will life be like after capitalism? How can we run a factory collectively? How do we collectively decide who gets what? Some activists would point to cooperatives—for example, local food cooperatives such as the Mondragon Industrial Cooperative<sup>3</sup> in the Basque region or the Seikatsu Club<sup>4</sup> in Japan—as examples of the new world in the shell of the old. Others use science fiction novels—such as *The Dispossessed*<sup>5</sup>—as possible models of a new world. Mostly anarchists and other agitators argue that a vision is not important at all, that no one can predict what the new world will look like and that having a vision is authoritarian. Instead, they argue that the new world will spring out of the struggle against the old world.<sup>6</sup>

*Thinking Forward: Learning to Conceptualize Economic Vision*  
By Michael Albert  
Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring, 1997.

*Moving Forward: Program for a Participatory Economy*  
By Michael Albert  
Oakland: AK Press, 2001.

*Parecon: Life after Capitalism*  
By Michael Albert  
New York: Verso, 2003

Peter Kropotkin thought differently. In the preface to Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget's famous book, *How We Shall Bring About The Revolution*, he addressed the importance of vision. First, he summarized his critics: "It is often said that plans ought not to be drawn up for a future society. All such plans we are told, are of the nature of romances, and they have the disadvantage, that some day they may hamper the creative force of a people in Revolution." Kropotkin counters, "On the other hand, it is necessary to have a clear idea of the actual concrete

results that our Communist, Collectivist, or other aspirations, might have on society. For this purpose we must picture to ourselves these various institutions at work." This is exactly what Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel have done in their work on participatory economics. Michael Albert notes that participatory economics should not be taken as a blueprint, but as a "broad understanding of new institutions to inform our dissent."<sup>7</sup> Kropotkin similarly wrote that a "book is not a gospel to be taken in its entirety or to be left alone. It is a suggestion, a proposal—nothing more. It is for us to reflect, to see what it contains that is good, and to reject whatever we find erroneous in it." May this multi-book review, then, contribute to the evaluation of Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel's proposal on participatory economic vision.<sup>8</sup>

Both Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel see their work within the context of the libertarian communist tradition. In an earlier work, Albert and Hahnel wrote that communist anarchism and council communism share an affinity with their views.<sup>9</sup> More recently, the journal *Science and Society* ran a special issue on theoretical alternatives to capitalism in which Albert and Hahnel describe the roots of their work as within the left-wing libertarian tradition.<sup>10</sup>

Each of the books reviewed here discuss the participatory economic vision. Before examining each book, let's first take a look at the basics of participatory economics.

## Valuative Criteria

Participatory economics is an economic system developed to foster six broad values: *equity*, or fair and just outcomes; *solidarity*, or caring and mutual respect among all people; *diversity* of outcomes which would benefit everyone; *participatory self-management*, or having a say in decisions to the extent that one is affected by their outcomes; *efficiency*, or not wasting resources; and *environmental sustainability*, which



requires leaving behind stocks of each kind of natural capital as large as those we enjoy today.<sup>11</sup> These values, argue Albert and Hahnel, are critical to the evaluation of economic systems, which either fetter these values or promote them. Albert and Hahnel critique different economic systems, including capitalism, state socialism, market socialism, and green bioregionalism, all of which, they argue, do not promote these basic six values. Participatory economics, they assert, is the theoretical alternative that fosters these values.

### The Critique of Capitalism and other Alternatives to Capitalism

An economic system has three main tasks: to produce things, to consume things, and to distribute things in some way, which economists call allocation. "Capitalism is an economic system dedicated to production for profit and to the accumulation of value by private business firms."<sup>12</sup> Capitalism's main characteristics are the accumulation of value, private ownership of the means of production, production for profit, and hierarchical organization of the workplace, where some do boring and manual labor, while others do skilled work and still others make the decisions. In short, the producers of the surplus do not appropriate and distribute the surplus (surplus being that which exceeds what is necessary to replace the machinery, raw materials, and sustain the workers' standard of living).

Capitalism's consumption is characterized by the total neglect of others. Consumers think of only themselves and can ignore the effects of the goods they buy on the environment and on the workers who produced the goods. As Albert and Hahnel explain, "in capitalism it is nonsensical to consider others."<sup>13</sup> This is also a critique of all markets, not just markets under capitalism.<sup>14</sup> In a capitalist economy, things are allocated by markets, but markets also allocate goods in other economic systems, such as market socialism, of which the Mondragon Cooperatives are a good example. Markets do not promote solidarity or concern for the well-being of others; actually they do the very opposite. Thus, Albert and Hahnel argue, a desirable economic system should not have markets allocate goods since this will promote rugged individualism.

Albert argues that capitalism violates all the basic values; it does not promote equity, solidarity, efficiency, environmental sustainability, self-management, or diversity. In fact, capitalism does the contrary. Capitalism generates atomized, self-interested behavior, not solidarity. Capitalism generates inefficiency since it is based on individual actors. Capitalism's environmental record speaks for itself; it destroys biodiversity. Capitalism generates huge income and wealth differentials. Capitalism does not promote self-management but instead generates a situation where a few make decisions for the many.

Capitalism does not generate diversity, it pushes people into boring and repetitive jobs, and creates a consumer culture based on a few brand names.

Similarly, Albert and Hahnel argue that market socialism, central planning, and green bioregionalism do not promote the desirable values. Markets generate inequality, destroy diversity, do not promote self-management, promote individualistic behavior that counters the notion of solidarity, and miscalculate the prices of environmental resources. Central planning similarly violates the values. It breeds authoritarianism and this counters solidarity, equity, and self-management. Central planning is alienating and creates a class of bureaucrats and managers, what Albert and Hahnel call a coordinator class. Green bioregionalism is a vague system that is popular with some activists in the United States today. Albert criticizes bioregionalism, arguing that it does not promote an alternative system of allocation, that it is too focused on scale and self-sufficiency, and that this vision will not eliminate classes.

### The ABCs of Participatory Economics

*What a sad and tragic mistake! To give full scope to socialism entails rebuilding from top to bottom a society dominated by the narrow individualism of the shopkeeper. It is not as has sometimes been said by those indulging in metaphysical woolliness just a question of giving the worker "the total product of his labor"; it is a question of completely reshaping the relationships...in the factory, in the village, in the store, in production, and in distribution of supplies. All relations between individuals and great centers of population have to be made all over again, from the very day, from the very moment one alters the existing commercial organization. — Peter Kropotkin<sup>15</sup>*

Participatory economics envisions a very different economy with new institutional arrangements. Instead of private ownership of capital, there is social ownership of the means of production, which means either there are no owners or everyone owns the means of production, so ownership does not generate income or power differences as it does in capitalism. Allocation has a different set of institutional arrangements; instead of markets, there is a system of democratic or participatory planning. Consumer councils create consumption plans, workplace councils create workplace plans, and facilitation boards (administrative institutions) try to refine the different plans and make them correspond. Everybody participates, everyone helps make decisions. Participatory economics has a few new elements that I will briefly introduce. First, it has democratic workers and consumer councils. Second, it is characterized by the concept of balanced-job complexes. Third, remuneration is determined according to one's effort as judged by one's work-

mates. And, fourth, participatory planning is the allocation mechanism that replaces central planning and markets.

Workers are organized in workers' councils. This is the first step in establishing non-hierarchical and dignified work. Every work place is governed by these workers' councils. Albert and Hahnel recognize that democratic councils by themselves do not promote participation sufficiently because while some work is empowering, some work is not. Disempowered workers would come to the council (or not come) lacking information, skill, and energy to participate in a meaningful manner. To solve this problem, Albert and Hahnel propose balanced job complexes, which I think is their most valuable and original theoretical contribution.

Jobs are a certain combination of tasks, and in our current system, certain jobs are intended to be rote jobs, while others are more rewarding. Jobs are organized in a very hierarchical manner. So if one would create a workplace council in such a place there would be power differences. Take for example a person, who has only been sweeping the floor all day, and another who has been meeting all day, thinking, and making decisions. The latter has much more information than the former. When these two people sit on the council, one will be in a position to participate on a different level, which will create a monopoly of knowledge. Thus, it is necessary to break up jobs so that they are more egalitarian. This is what a balanced job complex is—a restructuring of tasks that need to be performed so that instead of having one person run the place while the other sweeps it, tasks are combined and balanced in such a way that each job is equally rote and rewarding, and each person has a fair share of each sort of task. This concept of the balanced job complex is key to creating a more egalitarian world where people are empowered and have control over their own lives—a society that has neither masters nor slaves.

After people are provided with their basic needs, workers will be paid according to their effort, as judged by their workmates. This system of remuneration is how participatory economics addresses problems of incentives. With this “payment” or “effort rating,” a worker will be allocated a certain amount of consumer goods beyond his or her needs. Similar to workers, consumers are organized in councils at different levels, from the neighborhood, the town or city, county, region, etc. Individual consumers can go to outlets to shop for different kinds of goods. These goods are allocated to these outlets through a participatory planning process.

In participatory planning, both workers' and consumers' councils participate directly in the formulation of a plan. The workers' and consumers' councils propose and revise their own activity prior to initiating those activities. “Indicative

prices,” as determined in the planning process, are used as a communicative tool to estimate the full social costs and benefits of inputs and outputs. Indicative prices are only quantitative measures of social costs to supplement qualitative measures of the social costs of a product. This is an iterative and continuous process where every actor and every level proposes its own plans.

The process starts with the workers' and consumers' councils. The workers' councils formulate a production plan and submit it to a federation of councils and finally to an iteration board. The council request certain inputs and submits a plan for outputs. Regional and industry-wide federations aggregate proposals and keep track of excess supply and demand.

Similarly, individuals and households submit consumption proposals for private goods to the neighborhood councils. Then the neighborhood councils submit the plans for collective and private goods to a federation of councils before it finally goes to the iteration board.

The iteration board compiles all of the plans and makes suggestions on revising the plans by changing the prices. The plans go back to the councils for revision, and this bargaining goes through successive iterations. This is done yearly, but at the same time this process is flexible enough to update the plans when things change.

This is a very short description of participatory economics and it is impossible to justice to the detailed and complex descriptions in the books by Albert and Hahnel.<sup>16</sup> Now let's look at three books by Michael Albert.

### *Thinking Forward: Learning to Conceptualize Economic Vision* (1997)

*The decadent international but individualistic capitalism ... is not a success. It is not intelligent, it is not beautiful, it is not just, it is not virtuous—and it doesn't deliver the goods. In short, we dislike it and we are beginning to despise it. But when we wonder what to put in its place, we are extremely perplexed.* — John Maynard Keynes<sup>17</sup>

Like Albert and Hahnel's *Looking Forward* (1991) and *The Political Economy of Participatory Economics* (1991), Albert's *Thinking Forward* describes participatory economics in detail, but it is set up very differently. It is divided into ten chapters. The book starts off by discussing the necessity of vision, then describes what an economy is and the six basic values that the economy should foster. In Chapter 2, Albert evaluates the existing visionary options. The ensuing chapters discuss values associated with production, consumption, and allocation. Then, based on these values, Albert argues for the basic institutions that make up a participatory economics.

The last part of the book evaluates participatory economics and responds to its critics.

What is unique about this book is not only its accessibility, but also the way each chapter is structured. This book does not read as most books do. In the first part of each chapter, Albert challenges the reader to think by first describing certain concepts and then posing some rather difficult questions. At the end of each chapter, there is discussion of his answers to the questions. This makes the reader think and question throughout the book. When a question is posed, it makes the reader step back, think, grapple with the concepts, then try to answer it in her or his own way. In last part of the chapter, the reader can then read Albert's answers. This set up is very instructive and helps readers understand this economic vision on a new level. The unique way this book is structured is conducive to really understanding the basic institutions of our economy, how participatory economics differs from the current model, and how it works. It is also conducive to learning how this method could be applied in other areas to create other visions or to modify this vision.

For those unfamiliar with participatory economics, *Thinking Forward* is an excellent introduction. For the reader interested in the debate that Albert and Hahnel's vision has generated, the last forty-five pages of the book are dedicated to summaries of critiques of participatory economics, clarifications, and responses. These debates are very interesting and span a wide spectrum of perspectives, including those of activists and academics.<sup>18</sup> Some of these debates are engaged with proponents of other democratically planned economic visions, such as Pat Devine, or with proponents of a market socialist vision, such as Thomas Weisskopf. Although Comparative Economic Systems scholars used to study the Soviet Union during the Cold War, today leftist economists who write about alternative economic systems have shifted their focus to debates between market socialism and participatory planning. The last chapter in *Thinking Forward* fits very nicely into this comradely but important brawl.

### ***Moving Forward: Program For A Participatory Economy (2001)***

*The calloused hands of the fields and of the factories must clasp in fraternal salute because, truly, we workers are invincible; we are the force and we are the right. We are tomorrow. — Emiliano Zapata*

In the wake of the anti-globalization protests in Seattle and in Washington D.C., Albert penned this program to speak to a new and emerging movement and address how it should move forward. "Great social movements need long-run goals for inspiration and guidance and need short-run programs

for immediate orientation and agenda," writes Albert.<sup>19</sup> This book provides suggestions for how participatory economics is the long-run economic vision and alternative to capitalism and provides a program for how to get there.

The book, divided in seventeen chapters, has six main parts: on just rewards, self-management, dignified work, participatory allocation, economics and society, and the participatory economics program. Each part has a discussion of the long-run goals, a discussion of a short-run program, and a hypothetical discussion between an advocate of participatory economics and a critic.

In the first part, for example, Albert argues that a good economy should reward only effort and sacrifice instead of profit, power, or output. A program that would support some of the basic six values of participatory economics would include supporting the fight for higher wages, enhancing affirmative action, and increasing taxes on profit, property, wealth, and income. Albert believes we should struggle for these reforms in a non-reformist way.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the book, he argues that activists should strive and fight for incremental change and that a sequence of incremental changes will ultimately bring about radical change as long as we have a vision for a better world in mind. While I fundamentally differ on the role of revolutionaries in bringing about social transformation,<sup>21</sup> I believe Albert's ideas can help us understand and work within mass movements, or potential mass movements. While most of my activism certainly fights for small reforms, I see Albert's strategy as sort of a non-strategy, a strategy that says "All Hands On Deck." Much of Albert's program is not much of a program at all and there exists no strategic focus on how to transform this world into a free society. Just keep on plugging away at all the things you are doing, we just need more people to be doing it, he argues. For Albert, the movement(s) need to grow and intensify. What is the task for revolutionaries? It is the same as that of the liberal, except that the revolutionary wants to use this reform to raise consciousness with the goal of fundamentally altering the basics of this society. Much of the program for participatory economics that Albert suggests falls within this framework.

### ***Parecon: Life After Capitalism (2003)***

*It is necessary with bold spirit and in good conscience, to save civilization. We must halt the dissolution which corrodes and corrupts the roots of human society. The bare and barren tree can be made green again. Are we not ready? — Antonio Gramsci*

*Parecon* is Albert's latest book and is much longer and more comprehensive than his previous publications. This book is divided into four parts and 26 chapters and spans more than

300 pages. Much of the book covers material that is presented in its basic form in previous work by Albert and Hahnel. Part I discusses values and institutions. Part II describes the institutions and workings of the economic vision. Part III is an example of how a person would live their daily life under participatory economics to add richness to their abstract vision. Part IV addresses the critics of participatory economics. While *Parecon* does not add much new material or perspective to the previously developed vision—though it addresses some new criticisms—it is certainly nice to have a cleaned up version of the book that will reach a new audience.

*Parecon* does a very nice job of responding the critics. While most critics wonder whether participatory economics will be able to accomplish this or that practical task, few really critique its basic six values. Albert and Hahnel's vision comes very much from the study of microeconomics, the study of individual behavior. I don't think much of their efficiency criteria and I don't think it should be of any concern to leftists, for it is not a value a good society should have. This concept comes out of the utilitarian tradition, a tradition I expect few readers of this review would hold dear. Efficiency basically refers to the idea that an analysis can or should determine the net balance between all the positive and negative effects

of an economic action. For example, a cost-benefit analysis is done and all the benefits are added up, and all the costs are subtracted. If the positives outweigh the negatives the economic outcome is efficient and should be done. This of course, as you can imagine, creates huge problems. Can you identify and measure all effects? Who does it benefit? Can you just add up all the benefits and costs? Those familiar with utilitarianism can see the obvious relationship. Anarchists certainly don't come out of this liberal philosophical tradition, so why should we bother with their conceptions of the world?<sup>22</sup>

While Michael Albert is very prolific, clear and accessible, his writing at times is not the best. For those who have seen him speak, his books read just as if he is speaking to you. *Parecon* does this the least of all the reviewed books and it is the most stylistically pleasing among them.

Participatory Economics is a very rich vision of what a better world can look like. Certain people argue that capitalism might not be great, but it the best we have, so all we can do is improve it and make it more tolerable. Albert's books pull the rug from under this argument. Activists, organizers, and agitators often struggle to describe what kind of world we want; what would a world without cops or prisons look like? What would a world without private property look like? What would a world without patriarchy look like? Of course, many of these kinds of questions are impossible to really answer, but Albert and Hahnel have made an important contribution to envisioning what an alternative to capitalism might look like and how it might work. Whatever their flaws are, I hope that these books will be widely read and will foster much more pondering, talk, debate, and vision.

## Institute for Anarchist Studies

The Institute for Anarchist Studies is a nonprofit foundation established to support the development of anarchism. The IAS is primarily a grant-giving

organization for radical writers. Each year the IAS awards \$8000 US in grants to authors promoting critical scholarship on social domination and the reconstructive vision of a free society. To date, we have funded over forty projects by authors from countries around the world, including Argentina, Canada, Chile, Ireland, Nigeria, Germany, South Africa, and the United States.



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### Endnotes

1. Cited in Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, *The Political Economy of Participatory Economics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).
2. Rudolf Rocker, *Anarchism and Anarcho-Syndicalism* (London: Freedom Press, 1988).
3. See the official website: <http://www.mondragon.mcc.cs/>. Roy Morrison's *We Build the Road as We Travel* argues that Mondragon is the Third Way and a viable alternative to both capitalism and state socialism. For an anarcho-syndicalist critique, see *Libertarian Labor Review*, 19. For a book-length anthropological study and critique, see Sharon Kasmir, *The Myth of Mondragon* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).
4. See Richard Evanoff, *Social Anarchism* 26, 1998, <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/SA/en/display/248>
5. Ursula LeGuin, *The Dispossessed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974). Also see Marge Piercy, *Woman on the Edge of Time* (New York: Knopf, 1976).



6. For example, see "The Sad Conceit of Participatory Economics," *Northeastern Anarchist* 8.
7. Michael Albert, *Moving Forward: Program for a Participatory Economy*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2001), 10.
8. All Kropotkin quotes from Emile Pataud and Emile Pouget, *How We shall Bring About the Revolution: Syndicalism and the Cooperative Commonwealth* (London: Pluto Press, 1990), xxxi-xxxvii.
9. Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, *Unorthodox Marxism: An Essay on Capitalism, Socialism and Revolution* (Boston: South End Press, 1978), 314.
10. *Science and Society* 66, Spring 2002, 27.
11. These values are very nicely explained in many of their books. They are explained in most detail in Chapter 2 of Robin Hahnel, *The ABCs of Political Economy: A Modern Approach* (London: Pluto Press, 2002). For more on ecological economics and natural capital, see for example work by Herman Daly, especially *Steady-State Economics*.
12. Carol Heim, "Capitalism," Political Economy Research Institute Working Paper 41, 2002, <http://www.umass.edu/peri/pdfs/WP41.pdf> This is a great article that briefly explains capitalism and its historical evolution.
13. Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, *Looking Forward: Participatory Economics for the Twenty First Century*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 1991), 46.
14. For an excellent critique of markets, see Sam Bowles, "What Markets Can—and Cannot—do," *Challenge*, July-August 1991.
15. Quoted in Albert and Hahnel, *Looking Forward*, 46.
16. For an abstract and more academic presentation of their model, see Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel, *The Political Economy of Participatory Economics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). For a less academic and more institutionally rich description of Parecon, see Albert and Hahnel, *Looking Forward: Participatory Economics for the Twenty First Century* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1991). This last book is available on-line: <http://www.parecon.org>
17. Cited in Albert, *Thinking Forward*, 11. Keynes was by no means a revolutionary and critiqued capitalism in his day to modify it in order to prevent revolution.
18. For those interested in some of these debates, see Michael Albert, *Parecon: Life After Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2003), *Science and Society*, Spring 2002, and *Review of Radical Political Economics*, Fall and Winter 1992.
19. Albert, *Moving Forward*, 1.
20. Albert also writes about his strategy in *The Trajectory of Change: Activist Strategies for Social Transformation*, (Cambridge: South End Press, 2002). The basic strategy in the two books is the same. *The Trajectory of Change* is reviewed by Uri Gordon in "Chasing the Tornado," *The New Formulation*, 2, no. 1, February 2003. While I would certainly disagree with much of Gordon's critique, I also think he hits the point when he critiques the substance of Albert's non-reformist reform strategy.
21. See my book review of Noel Ignatiev's books in this issue of *The New Formulation*.
22. For a critique of efficiency, see Rick Wolff's "Efficiency: Whose Efficiency?" in *Post-Autistic Economics Review*, no. 16, October 2002, <http://www.paecon.net>

<i>Notes continued from page 30</i>
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17. John Garvey and Noel Ignatiev, eds. *Race Traitor* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1.
18. *Ibid.*, 9.
19. *Ibid.*, 9-10.
20. *Ibid.*, 11.
21. For a longer treatment of the topic, see *Theodore Allen, Invention of the White Race* (New York: Verso, 1994), *Joel Olson, Abolish the White Citizen* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, forthcoming), *Noel Ignatiev, Introduction to the United States: An Autonomous Political History* (Denver, CO: Final Conflict, 1978), and *Jacqueline Jones, American Work* (New York: Norton, 1998).
22. See "Interview with Noel Ignatiev" by *The Blast!* reprinted in *Race Traitor*, 287-292 for discussion on the relationship between capitalism and whiteness.
23. For an article that lays out four successive "peculiar institutions" from the first slave society to the first prison society, see Loic Wacquant, "From Slavery to Mass Incarceration," in *New Left Review* 13, Jan/Feb 2002. Also see Christian Parenti's *Lockdown America: Police and Prisons in the Age of Crisis* (New York: Verso, 2000) for an excellent and well-written class analysis of the U.S. Prison system. See also Joel Olsen's "Garden's of the Law: The Role of Prisons in Capitalist Society," in *Criminal Injustice: Confronting the Prison Crisis*, ed. Elihu Rosenblatt (Boston: South End Press, 1996).
24. Garvey and Ignatiev, eds., *Race Traitor*, 57.
25. C.L.R. James, *Facing Reality*.
26. Noel Ignatiev, ed., *The Lesson of the Hour* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr, 2001), 1.
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*, 16.
29. *Ibid.*, 23.
30. *Ibid.*, 75.
31. *Ibid.*, 86.
32. *Ibid.*, 46.
33. For an extensive discussion of Abolition-Democracy politics, see Joel Olsen, *Abolish the White Citizen* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

# Market Socialist Delusions of Fair and Just Markets

by Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro

Numerous apparently viable alternatives to capitalism have been proposed and discussed since the collapse of the USSR, when the bourgeoisie began inundating the world with propaganda about the absence of an alternative to “the market.” Anarchists need to be well-informed rather than dismissive of these currents in order to counter and discredit tendencies that distract people from the task of toppling the present state-based, capitalist world-system.

“Market socialism” (not to be confused with existing economic policies in China) is one such political platform that must be attacked for its reformist orientation. Supporters of market socialism pretend that an egalitarian society can be achieved without much social struggle by rectifying, through state intervention, the inequalities inherent in capitalism. For them, the issue of social equality is merely a matter of increasing the equitable—fair, but not necessarily equal—distribution of wealth, while simultaneously preserving the market as a mechanism for allocating resources, which does not measure efficiency in terms of equality, but in terms of profitability.<sup>1</sup>

The reactionary nature of market socialism results from two fundamental flaws. First, because it is not concerned with establishing the conditions for social equality, it does little to counteract capitalism’s distribution of resources in favor of the few at the majority’s expense. Second, it relies on the state as a guarantor of an equitable market-based distribution system. This latter problem demonstrates the poverty of market socialism alternatives in that its proponents tend to see the world only in terms of state or market institutions. The two recent volumes reviewed here introduce and clarify existing theories of market socialism and provide excellent summaries of the critiques and political implications of the concept from both mainstream and leftist views.

## Emergence of a Rhetorical Device

J.A. Yunker’s *On the Political Economy of Market Socialism: Essays and Analyses* is a collection of fourteen previously published articles in which the author reviews existing ideas and debates on market socialism and proposes his own “pragmatic” version. He attempts to demonstrate, through econometric analysis,<sup>2</sup> how capitalism could be improved through market socialism in matters of balancing social equity with efficiency in resource allocation, pricing mechanisms, and reconciling managerial profit-motives with overall investments.

*On the Political Economy of Market Socialism: Essays and Analyses*  
By James A. Yunker  
Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001

*Market Socialism:  
The Debate among Socialists*  
By Bertell Ollman (editor)  
New York: Routledge, 1998

According to Yunker, broadly speaking, proponents of market socialism attempt to reconcile market efficiency with equity. “Equity” is a current euphemism for the levels of social inequality acceptable to most social scientists and policy makers). This reconciliation typically involves state ownership of most land and capital related to large-scale production and otherwise minimal governmental control over productive enterprises (i.e., the devolution of smaller-scale production to company bosses). The hallmark of a market socialist system would be the appropriation of unearned income (rent, interest, profits) by the state, which has the task of evenly redistributing such income among the members of the public. Here the exclusionary nature of citizenship is a salient problem).

The idea that a market could be socialist springs from the “calculation debate” among Central European economists, such as Lange and von Mises, in the 1920s. The debate centered on whether existing “socialist” systems (e.g., the USSR) were more or less efficient than capitalist systems at establishing the correct market prices for goods and services. Lange envisioned a “Central Planning Board” (CPB) as the principal mechanism for setting prices, which would receive regular inventory reports from all businesses and harmonize prices to the scarcity or abundance of each commodity produced. The CPB would also preempt the emergence of monopolies by creating new businesses in a market sector when one company became dominant in that sector. It would also guarantee the efficient allocation of new investment resources.

Lange and others of his ilk, who believed that economic inequality fostered the higher efficiency in the distribution of goods and services, wished to provide a socialist equivalent to a perfectly competitive capitalism (which has never really existed). Crucially, this marked the abandonment of the notion of exploitation based on surplus-value extraction (the profits appropriated and controlled by the capitalists) in favor of adopting the reactionary assumptions of neoclassical economics.<sup>3</sup> The idea of market socialism, devoid of any fundamental critique of capitalism, was thus from the outset a rhetorical device to justify the state as the sole vehicle for creating the conditions for greater social equality and for affirming “the market” (i.e., a regulated capitalism) as the only system capable of maximizing the efficient allocation of resources.

## The Many Faces of Market Socialism

Lange's original ideas were resuscitated and modified during the 1980s and 1990s to compensate for argumentative weaknesses derived from a reliance on neoclassical assumptions that find no support in reality—such as the idea that wages and prices or supply and demand balance out as a result of the market's regular functioning or the existence of fully informed participants in the market (in economists' terminology; "equilibrium conditions," and "optimality in the distribution of information," respectively). The most notable and controversial contributors to the reformulation of Lange's model have been Roemer and Bardhan. Their version of market socialism differs from capitalism in five main aspects: the government redistribution of stocks according to birth-right; the nationalization of all banks; the determination of corporate management through the election of delegates from the main lending institutions, the firm's employees, and the stockholders; government investment planning through differential interest rates; and the nationalization (with stock redistribution to the public) of businesses that exceed a certain size or whose founder has died. According to Yunker and others, the Roemer-Bardhan model partially addresses the problems of owners or shareholders being able to monitor company managers and of providing sufficient incentives for managers to increase productivity and sales. From an anarchist point of view, these are not problems at all except in terms of ensuring the even distribution of resources in the absence of bosses of any sort). Still, the Roemer-Bardhan approach exhibits some of the weak neoclassical assumptions underlying the Lange model, namely what has been called "Pareto optimality"<sup>4</sup> which ignores the issues of distributive justice and of incentives required for technical or technological innovation, as well as the "Walrasian equilibrium" framework, which implies fully knowledgeable market participants pursuing their self-interest, a farcical notion based on no empirical evidence.

Although the most well-known in academic circles, the Roemer-Bardhan model is but one of several. J.A. Yunker identifies three market socialist approaches that have been proposed to improve upon Lange's earlier position. The first is Yunker's own position on market socialism, which he names "pragmatic socialism." This model retains capitalist market institutions, but establish[es] a revenue redistribution mechanism to correct economic inequality. Due to the increasing separation of enterprise ownership from managerial control in late capitalism, the crucial issue in Yunker's scheme becomes one of providing a set of incentives for corporate managers—rather than owners—to maximize productivity, "efficiency," or innovation. Under such a regime, the majority of citizens would not have right of ownership over land, warehouses, industrial plants, real estate, etc. (also known as capital property), except for that pertaining to small-

scale enterprise. This would be the case because large-scale property would be publicly owned and returns on property, such as rent, would be redistributed among citizens as dividends.

A second approach to market socialism can be categorized as "service socialism", whereby profit maximization (maximizing the amount of money made above the costs of production and distribution after the sale of commodities) is replaced by caps on production or on revenues (company incomes) through state planning, regulation, and incentives. The literature on the nationalization of principal industries is frequently associated with this approach. In contrast, a "cooperative socialism" view would involve employees governing enterprises for their own benefit, but wider economic arrangements would remain under the ultimate control of the state. This notion departs considerably from both anarcho-syndicalist and Marxist ideas, as employees in firms characterized by a high organic composition of capital<sup>5</sup> would receive higher incomes than employees in enterprises based on more labor-intensive production methods, a situation that would maintain or even increase economic inequality.

## The Market in a Socialist Society

Offering a more critical examination of market socialism, B. Ollman's edited volume, *Market Socialism: The Debate among Socialists* expands on the problems of the market as a social—not just economic—dynamic that involves political decisions and cultural constructs. The debate involves four Marxists, of which two are market socialists and thus reside rather uneasily in that category. *Market Socialism* is divided into four major parts, the first two of which contain D. Schweickart's and J. Lawler's essays for and H. Ticktin's and B. Ollman's essays against market socialism. The latter two parts feature a critical dialogue between the two authors. A proponent of market socialism, Schweickart argues that the complexities arising from modern technology and the wide range of goods eliminate the possibility of self-sufficient communities and that participatory economic planning in large, industrial economies is a logistical impossibility. Therefore, his model of "economic democracy," as a form of market socialism, is the most viable alternative to capitalism. This alternative system would provide for (a) worker self-management in firms (with workers voting to elect enterprise managers), (b) the social control of investment by turning profits into a direct tax base and redistributing the funds derived from taxation to everyone as part of their citizenship right, and (c) a market for goods and services. Lawler, on other hand, finds market socialism in Marx's own writings. He argues, according to the *Communist Manifesto*, that market production would be gradually absorbed into communist social relations following the revolution in a step-by-step transformation to a new social

order sensitive to evolving socio-economic conditions. This transformation period is what Lawler believes would be a form of market socialism, with the state as the main instrument of such a transformation, and would eventually lead to the development of a classless society.

Ollman criticizes the very notion of the viability of market socialism and sees a central problem of capitalist society in the alienation of people from the commodities they consume. He argues that the culture created through market exchange fabricates desires and needs for commodities, atomizes people, and mystifies the relationship between people as a relationship among things. Such a culture would be incompatible with socialism and so should not be part of a transformation process toward a socialist society. Ticktin takes a much stronger stance against market socialism by viewing the two terms as mutually incompatible by definition. This “definitional nonsense,”<sup>6</sup> is due to the fact that he defines socialism by the relative degree of democratic planning in a context of abundance, the absence of money and exchange-value (value based solely on what can be bought and sold in the market), and global socialism. The market, on the other hand, is equated with capitalism, a sort of socially divisive system that is decaying and being “artificially maintained.”

### A Socialism of Capitalist Inefficiency and State Repression

In its starting assumptions, the debate over the viability of market socialism reduces the realm of political possibilities to either a state- or capitalist-based organization of society. In the case of Roemer and Bardhan, among other proponents, they fail utterly to understand that the economic relations in their idea of market conditions are really a set of political relations based on force—one of the main critiques that Marx leveled at liberal democracies. As Marxists such as Ollman have argued, even more flawed is market socialists’ assumption that the problems of capitalism (inequality, investment irrationality, etc.) are technical in character and can be resolved through changes in economic policies, when such policies are nothing more than the results of political struggles over the nature and distribution of property (resources).

Yunker’s “pragmatic” socialism merely presents a neoclassical economics approach under a socialist veneer. First he misidentifies the main charges against capitalism and then misdiagnoses the core problems of capitalism. In his estimation, the “traditional or historical critique of capitalism consists of three key elements: a) capitalism is responsible for devastating business depressions; b) capitalism produces an unacceptable level of income inequality; c) capitalism perpetuates the inequity involved in the highly unequal distribution of an unearned property return.”<sup>7</sup> But these are actually not the “traditional or historical” critiques of

capitalism at all. The usual basis for rejecting capitalism is the inequality in the control over the means of production and the illegitimacy of private property. Concepts such as surplus-value extraction, alienation, egalitarianism, monopoly capital, to name but a few, are completely alien to Yunker’s fictitious “traditional or historical critique of capitalism.” It is startling to see a “pragmatic” socialist ignore the main critiques leveled at liberal democracies by socialists of many different backgrounds, from anarchist to Marxist. The diagnosis that directly follows such statements is even more perplexing. “It is proposed,” so continues the “pragmatic” socialist, “that of these three, the first is no longer strongly relevant, the second is valid only insofar as it overlaps the third, and in fact only the third is unambiguously and without qualification still valid and applicable in the present day.”<sup>8</sup> According to Yunker, then, capitalism is not responsible for devastating business depressions anymore. If this is so, one wonders, then, to what century does the “present day” refer, since the 1997 crisis in East Asia and the current recession, which have meant the denial of basic subsistence to millions, have occurred very recently and in direct connection to world capitalism. Lastly, the overlap between Yunker’s “traditional” critiques “b” and “c” is again a function of Yunker’s ridiculous misinterpretation of the actual critiques of capitalism, such as the unprecedented, structural, and widening chasm between the wealthy and the poor. It is not about unacceptable *levels* of income inequality, but about the unacceptable existence of economic inequality in the first place—inequality which is produced by the expropriation of resources from the masses through the institution of private property for the accumulation of wealth for the few.

In the end, all market socialist models reduce political alternatives to state and market controls over resource allocation. They contribute to the typical market inefficiencies that result from individualistic investment decisions (at the expense of the wider public through bail-outs and unemployment). And they concentrate on notions of distribution and efficiency without questioning property relations, the social processes of production (i.e., the everyday repression of unremunerated houseworkers, expropriation of the means of subsistence of the many to favor the wealthy few, exploitation in the workplace, the lack of democracy over resource use and distribution), and knowledge formation (i.e., who gets what sort of education, whose knowledge counts and for what, and other matters that escape the feeble imagination of most academics).

In contrast to the unsupported arguments and leaps of logic in the market socialist camp, mainstream opponents of market socialism live more pleasantly in a fantasy world where the capitalist market exists independently from the national states that have been pivotal in its development and are crucial to

maintaining it. It is only by negating historical and empirical evidence that mainstream economists can claim perfect competition and the most efficient allocation of resources as the hallmark of capitalism. Minimal to no state intervention is the typical recommendation for solving market problems, even though such intervention is essential to the existence of capitalism and the very basis of private property is unthinkable without a strong state creating appropriate legislation and enforcing it through the courts and the police.

In spite of their efforts to repudiate such specious argumentation, the Marxist critics Ollman and Ticktin fail to question the very premises of capitalists' power; that is to say state repression by threat or use of violence. This repression enforces and reproduces—through property laws and the education system, for instance—the market mystification that Ollman rightly but insufficiently critiques. More disconcerting, like market socialists, the Marxist critics disregard unpaid work and the environmental devastation that never appears on the balance sheets of companies' profits and losses. They fail to grasp that one of capitalism's main contradictions is the reduction of all values to that (partially) calculated through (some) human labor, while simultaneously making human labor itself increasingly redundant through the mechanization of production.<sup>9</sup> In addition, they underestimate the extent to which the state is an elite-based social structure founded on inequality (if they even consider the state a problematic institution!). It is by overlooking these general contradictions and omissions that these Marxist critics miss the opportunity to expose the reactionary underpinnings of market socialist ideas of which anarchists should also beware.

Market socialism is therefore no alternative to capitalism. It reinforces the existing social order by trying to reform the system, using the state to introduce different economic policies, rather than changing it through a revolutionary social struggle that would topple the state-based, capitalist world-system. This reactionary emphasis originates from the lack of concern for social equality and the conception of society in terms of markets and states, which necessarily denies the possibility of egalitarian alternatives beyond market and state.

## Endnotes

1. Mainstream economists and policy-makers frequently appeal to efficiency issues in order to dismiss economic alternatives as impractical or utopian in a pejorative sense. Such specious argument can be easily dismantled by questioning what a process, such as the market, is efficient at accomplishing. It would then be clear that efficiency is not an adequate or sufficient criterion to use when evaluating an economic system. For example, capitalism is very efficient at producing enormous quantities of
2. Econometrics is a branch of economics in which formulaic abstractions (prices, wages, etc.) and/or statistical data are analyzed through mathematical modeling.
3. Neoclassical economics is a body of theories closely associated with classical and neoliberal philosophies that were developed more than 200 years ago to justify the capitalist system. According to Neoclassical economists, a truly competitive market (the "free market") is composed of small consumers and firms which individually have only minimal market impact. Firms purchase factors of production (land, labor, capital) to maximize their profits through the production and selling process. Neoclassicists assume society to be comprised of self-interested individuals, whose only desires are to maximize "utility" (satisfaction). This fictitious system, which ignores existing cooperation among individuals, the activities of the state that are essential to the system itself, the tendency for centralization and concentration of wealth (market monopolies), and other realities of market-based societies, is supposedly regulated through supply and demand interactions in the market. These function as a redistributive mechanism for resources and income (i.e., wages or, put differently, access to resources). Among other problems, this economic model is really a poorly camouflaged belief system that fails to question who controls what kind of supplies and who can make what sort of economic demands, given actually existing and ever increasing wealth inequalities.
4. The idea that the reallocation of resources, under optimal conditions of efficient distribution of goods and services, cannot be done without reducing the wealth of some groups, or, put differently, that redistributing resources towards the poor would transgress market optimality conditions because it would mean taking resources away from the wealthy.
5. This is the ratio of the value of materials, machinery, and other fixed costs of an enterprise relative to the value of the labor-power contributed by the employed workers (e.g., costs of goods, services used in production relative to total wages). In other words, a greater use of machinery to maximize the production goods usually leads to higher

commodities. At the same time, capitalism is equally efficient at devastating the rest of nature and humans themselves through the consumption of resources and the environmental pollution required for the production of those commodities. In addition, capitalism is tremendously efficient at creating ever-larger wealth inequalities, such that millions of people can die of starvation amidst a global oversupply of food. So the issue should not be how efficient a system is, but what a system is efficient at accomplishing.

*Notes continued on page 60*



# Liberatory Art and Authentic Collaboration

by Kai Barrow

*The political is found in the least likely places, covered by multiple layers of ideological*

*counterfeiting and acculturation. Our daily lives, our dreams, love, death, and even our bodies are all spheres of “invisible” yet intense political and human dramas that take place behind the “visible” political struggle. For it is from the inside that we must decide*

*our real needs, both material and spiritual. Art of liberation springs from this perspective, recognizing the power of the imagination’s struggle. Throughout history, the imagination’s struggle against prohibitions based on fear and ignorance has been one of the leading political processes that push forward the liberation of the human spirit by recognizing and creating new territories of freedom. —Elizam Escobar<sup>1</sup>*

*Art on the Line, Essays by Artists About the Point Where Their Art & Activism Intersect*

By Jack Hirschman (editor)

Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 2002

*One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*

By Miwon Kwon

Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002

that indoctrinates us with racist images and myths backed up by institutional control. From tracking in public education to the police as an occupying army within our neighborhoods, people of color are forced to accept the ideology of white supremacy and the ruling class. In this sense, an art of resistance was critical to furthering a Black liberation agenda.

Born at the tail end of the fifties and raised in Chicago by activist parents, I cannot recall a time when I was not politically engaged. A culture of resistance, protest politics and institution-building led by people of color in the 1960s and 1970s had a tremendous influence on my life. Often, the art of this period was produced collaboratively and intended to foment social change.<sup>2</sup>

One of my earliest memories recalls the “Wall of Respect” on 43rd Street. Painted in 1967 by members of the Organization of Black American Culture,<sup>3</sup> the mural was situated among barber shops, chicken shacks and liquor stores, fixtures in most urban ghettos. It was a testament to historical memory and visions of liberation. My grandmother had a beauty shop in the neighborhood and periodically, bored with the gossip and the smells of frying hair, my brother and I would run around the corner to watch the images of Malcolm and Harriet, Nina and Coltrane come to life. Music was always playing, sometimes live, and we were asked to suggest colors for different areas of the wall. Sometimes we even got to add a stroke of paint. The artists and winos hanging out on the corner would school us as we stood with other neighborhood children and adults fascinated by the process. They taught a history that did not grace the Chicago Board of Education’s curriculum. Later, after the mural was finished, it felt good to stand in front of it with my parents and receive a quarter for every person I recognized. I would get an extra nickel if I could share a little background information on the person’s life.

The “Wall of Respect” became for me a catalyst and reward for learning about myself. It helped affirm me in a society

As I grew older and realized that “The Revolution” was not going to happen NOW, I began to think about what I can do to contribute to that process. As an organizer and artist (painter, installation, and performance art), I am constantly searching for ways that art can be used as a tool for liberation. That is, how can art facilitate a process of dialogue, discovery, healing, and transformation for the individual and the group? What are the purposes, potentials, and problems of a liberatory art?

*Art on the Line, Essays by Artists About the Point Where Their Art & Activism Intersect*, edited by Jack Hirschman and *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, by Miwon Kwon, examine art beyond the aesthetic and as a process of liberatory engagement. Where Hirschman’s anthology of essays and interviews impose a dictum to produce “revolutionary” art, Kwon raises critical questions about art as a collective artistic praxis in today’s urban communities.<sup>4</sup> They help us think about how anti-authoritarian art can reinvigorate our movements and help fashion an ethos of resistance and freedom. What is an anti-authoritarian art praxis? And how can anti-authoritarian art be useful in supporting liberation movements?

*Art on the Line* includes essays and interviews from an array of artists from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the United States. The anthology grew out of a pamphlet series of the same name edited by Richard Schaaf and published by Curbstone Press in the early 1980s. Six pamphlets by Roque Dalton; Vladimir Mayakovsky; César Vallejo (two); George Grosz, John Heartfield, and Wieland Herzfelde; and Jorge Sanjinés and the Ukamau Group were published in the series. Hirschman begins his anthology with this series, in which five of the six pieces pre-date 1970.

*Art on the Line* continues from the pamphlet series to include essays and interviews written (or transcribed) in the 1980s and 1990s. Here, Hirschman attempts to expand the “strands from an emerging multicultural (class, race, and gender)

discourse in a time of rapid technological and ideological change.”<sup>5</sup> The collection examines art from a range of disciplines and includes Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz, Ernesto Cardenal, Miranda Bergman, Amiri Baraka, Luis J. Rodríguez, Margaret Randall, Elizam Escobar, Susan Sherman/Kimiko Hahn/Gale Jackson, Richard Edmondson, Paul LaRaue, James Scully, Arturo Arias, Csaba Polony/Etel Adnan, Ferruccio Brugnaro, Carol Tarlen, Martín Espada and Jack Hirschman.

A member of the League of Revolutionaries for a New America, Hirschman is a frequent contributor to *Left Curve* magazine and author of over 90 books of poetry. His politics thread throughout the anthology, from the authors that he includes to his introductory comments. In the introduction, written post-September 11th, Hirschman raises the question of relevancy: “Are these essays in fact of any use anymore? Aren’t they out-dated with the fall of the Soviet Union, the defeat of the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua...” He maintains that they are not outdated. In fact, he states, “the need for ideas with respect to revolutionary collectivity, especially along the cultural front, is essential.”<sup>6</sup> Though *Art on the Line* is somewhat doctrinaire and doesn’t offer a lot in terms of “new” thinking or critique, hearing from individual artists about their political and artistic motivations makes it a worthwhile read.

Hirschman urges readers to pay particular attention to “Art is in Danger!,” from the first pamphlet series, referring to the piece as “among the most ‘grounding’ of the texts in relation to the tasks of revolutionaries today.”<sup>7</sup> In this work German artists George Grosz, John Heartfield and Wieland Herzfelde challenge the concept of art and artists that privileges art over the struggles of the people for food, jobs, and shelter. They urge artists to commit themselves to the workers in class struggle: “What could a worker do with art when—despite all the horror—art continues to project an ideal, untouchable world, when it continues to overlook the crimes of the owners and to mislead him with its bourgeois representation of the world as a peaceful and orderly place. An art that delivers him into the teeth of his oppressors, rather than one that agitates against those dogs.”<sup>8</sup>

The role of art/artists in serving a liberatory agenda frames *Art on the Line* and is a major question among revolutionary and/or activist artists today. Can political art be “good” art?<sup>9</sup> Mainstream institutions (museums, funders, publishers, etc) dictate a formalist approach to art—that it remain aloof from the concerns of everyday life. In the 1950s, the American school of Abstract Expressionism (Jackson Pollock was prominent among the Abstract Expressionists)

was upheld as the epitome of pure and free art. At the height of the Cold War, the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) coordinated numerous international exhibitions exporting Abstract Expressionism.<sup>10</sup>

Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, Kenyan poet and playwright, elaborates on this theme in his essay, “Freedom of the Artist: People’s Artists Versus People’s Rulers.” Wa Thiong’o posits, “the arts are a form of knowledge about reality acquired through a pile of images.”<sup>11</sup> He maintains that these images are not neutral, but reflect the “angle of vision” of the artist, where internal and external factors such as the natural, spiritual, economic, political and social freedoms through which the artist operates color her interpretations.

Wa Thiong’o poses three questions for consideration in approaching the problem of the freedom of the artist:

1. Has the artist equipped himself with a world view which enables him to see as much of the world as it is possible for him to see and to make us see? Will the artist choose the angle of vision of the possessing classes? Or will he choose the angle of vision of the dispossessed?<sup>12</sup>
2. Is the artist operating in a situation in which he is continually being harassed by the state, or continually under the threat of harassment?<sup>13</sup>
3. Is he operating within a social structure that inhibits all social systems?

These questions raise challenges for anti-authoritarian artists particularly in relation to strategies and visions that may seem contradictory to anarchist/anti-authoritarian politics (for example, nationalism and national liberation struggles by people of color). Can the art that emerges from the anti-authoritarian community be relevant in both content and process to people of color engaged in sovereignty struggles? What does an anti-authoritarian art look like that supports the liberation of oppressed communities?



Chicago's Wall of Respect. From:

<http://www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/wallofrespect/>

Does the artist have the democratic right to speak without fear of imprisonment or death? Artists who receive state or corporate funding, status, fame and wealth, generally support the status quo. Those who aim to overthrow the entire system are censored through invisibility. Even those on the conservative left silence the artist that uses her work to raise contradictions or offer a differing analysis. Even if artists do not face death or imprisonment as a result of their work, the threat of losing or being denied funding, publishing and exhibition opportunities, can result in self-censorship.<sup>14</sup> This challenges anti-authoritarians to create self-sustaining institutions that allow artists to produce and distribute their work; develop an art that facilitates participatory processes, and maintain an openness to dissent.

If the artist is operating within a system that is predicated on hierarchy and domination, what is her responsibility in projecting alternative visions and values? For anarchist artists, this challenges the political framework of social realism—a style popular in the early twentieth century which portrayed the oppressed in themes of injustice and martyrdom.<sup>15</sup> Elizabeth Catlett, Charles White, and Diego Rivera, for example, used social realism to depict the struggles and magnificence of their people. In so doing, they inverted the dominant paradigm that portrayed people of color as inferior. But is portraying social ills alone an art of liberation?

Elizam Escobar, a Puerto Rican *independentista*, painter and former political prisoner, considers the visionary role of the artist in his essay, “Art of Liberation: A Vision of Freedom.” Escobar writes that “if art is to become a force for social change, it must take its strength from the *politics of art*, art’s own way of affecting both the world and the political-direct. But the politics of art will only happen if the power of the imagination is able to create a symbolic relationship between those who participate, the artwork and the concrete world, always understanding the work of art’s sovereignty (or relative autonomy) in relation to concrete reality.”<sup>16</sup> This approach calls on artists to prioritize the imagination in order to create a revolutionary dialogue or exchange; one that is absent of didacticism and that does not pretend to offer solutions, but instead provokes dialogue. Escobar challenges artists to liberate themselves from the “*culture of fear*, and the inferiority/superiority complex we have in our dealings at the political-direct level.”<sup>17</sup>

Gale Jackson, in her conversation with Kimiko Hahn and Susan Sherman, also addresses the power of the imagination in creating social change. “If you don’t liberate people’s hearts, you pass the civil rights bill one more time. The problems we face demand the fullest of our capabilities. Our imagination. Anger. These are the places that organizing and imagination absolutely must meet.”<sup>18</sup>

Excerpts from Sherman, Hahn and Jackson’s letters, discussions and taped conversations make up “Three Voices/Together: A Collage.” These women writers (poetry, playwriting, and storytelling) discuss the art-making process from a perspective most aligned with the “personal is political” ideology of feminism. Their dialogue spans a broad spectrum weaving together identity, origin, and politics. Sherman, Hahn and Jackson emphasize culture and expression as a vital part of the revolutionary process—ensuring the survival of oppressed peoples. “For most of us, maintaining our cultural identity has been a crucial, political act,” says Jackson.<sup>19</sup> The utilitarian quality of People’s Art—from the hymns and quilts of chattel slaves that conveyed escape plans to the folk tales passed down through generations to articulate societal values—can help maintain a continuum of resistance and provide meaning for those who have minimal power.<sup>20</sup>

Currently, many activist and/or revolutionary artists are foregoing the concept of the individual genius in favor of art as a process of collective engagement. Artists working with and in community has become a popular approach. Where *Art on the Line* explores theories of art as a political endeavor, Miwon Kwon, in *One Place After Another* examines the praxis of public and community-based art.

*One Place After Another* traces the history of site-specific art from the 1960s through the 1990s with particular attention to its social, political, and economic dimensions. In the United States, three distinct models are identified in the contemporary public art movement. The art-in-public-places model, characterized as modernist abstract sculptures; the art-as-public-spaces model, typified as design-driven urban sculptures such as street furniture, architectural constructions, and landscaped environments, and the art-in-the-public-interest model, distinguished for prioritizing social issues and political activism and/or for engaging community collaborations. These practices are commonly referred to as site-specific art.<sup>21</sup>

Kwon seeks to “reframe site specificity as the cultural mediation of broader social, economic, and political processes that organize urban life and urban space.”<sup>22</sup> She challenges the notion of fixed sites, moving beyond the inherited conception of site-specificity as a grounded, singular event, and points to the works of artists such as Mark Dion, Andrea Fraser, Renée Green as innovative in their use of the site as complex and multiply located. Once designated to specific geographical and architectural settings, the site can now be as varied as a “billboard, an artistic genre, a disenfranchised community, an institutional framework, a magazine page, a social cause or a political debate. It can be literal, like a street corner, or virtual, like a theoretical concept.”<sup>23</sup>

*One Place After Another* is dense in postmodernist language and concepts, and a difficult read for those of us who are outside of the academy (Kwon is an Assistant Professor of Art History at the University of California, Los Angeles). The book is informed by urban theory, postmodernist criticism in art and architecture, and debates concerning identity politics and the public sphere. It could be a worthy enterprise for a study group as it raises a number of compelling questions for anti-authoritarian artists.

*One Place After Another* is particularly useful in its critical examination of the art-in-the-public-interest model (which includes community-based art). Kwon lays out the arguments surrounding community-based art primarily through an exploration of the concept of community and an examination of the role the artist/art institution play in community-based art projects.

Art-in-the-public-interest, a term coined by the critic Arlene Raven, is defined as "...activist and communitarian in spirit; its modes of expression encompass a variety of traditional media, including painting and sculpture, as well as nontraditional media—"street art, guerrilla theater, video, page art, billboards, protest actions and demonstrations, oral histories, dances, environments, posters, murals." Raven, in her description of the form, states that it "forges direct intersections with social justice issues, encourages community coalition-building in pursuit of social justice and attempts to garner greater institutional empowerment for artists to act as social agents. Artists engaged in such art aspire to reveal the plight and plead the case of the disenfranchised and disadvantaged and to embody what they view as humanitarian values."<sup>24</sup>

Additionally, Raven and other proponents of art-in-the-public interest see this form as encouraging the involvement of artists in institutional decision-making, more representation by people of color, women and other oppressed groups, and demands that museums and funding agencies use their influence to change government policies on social issues.

One of the most widely recognized public art projects in the United States, the Chicago-based "Culture In Action," used community-art to address social issues such as gang violence, HIV/AIDS, public housing, ecology, multicultural neighborhoods, labor and management relations and the accomplishments of women. Eight artists and community partnerships created projects as diverse as a storefront hydroponic garden, a paint chart and a new line of candy. Culture In Action aimed to push the boundaries of public art.<sup>25</sup>

The collaborative, socio-political approach to art-making perhaps resonates most with anti-authoritarian artists. However, cautionary voices raise concerns about community-based art, particularly in relation to its production of fixed notions of community, appropriation and exploitation. Further, artists using this method may unintentionally aid in the colonization of a community where the targeting of marginalized groups leads to community members becoming both subject and co-producer of their own appropriation in the name of self-affirmation.<sup>26</sup> Kwon's inclusion of critiques around art-in-the-public interest/community-based art can be helpful in to us in our work.

Kwon states that even the term community, once defined as a collective body with similar interests, has become a "highly charged and extremely elastic political term." Kwon points to the neo-conservative use of the term to conjure new forms of exclusionary policies in housing, health care, social services and education. "In its drive toward the greater privatization of public institutions and services and the decentralization of state authority, the right has appropriated the concept of the community as well. The dismantling of certain state-sponsored social and cultural programs that especially benefit the poor and the ill, for instance, are carried out now in the name of community activism and community self-determination."<sup>27</sup>

Another concern around community-based art is its potential to diffuse rather than serve as a catalyst for social and economic change. According to Iñigo Manglano-Ovalle, an artist who participated in "Culture In Action," "There is a growing and disturbing similarity between initiatives such as community policing and community-based cultural programs. Both motivated at times by a paranoiac fear of a social upheaval."<sup>28</sup>

Critic Grant Kester has argued that community-based art is a kind of "aesthetic evangelism," comparing the functioning of community-based artists to nineteenth-century reformers and social workers. Kester states that the "prevailing logic of community-based art reproduces a reformist ideology that, like Victorian-era evangelism, envisions personal inner transformation and growth as the key to the amelioration of social problems such as poverty, crime, hopelessness, unemployment and violence."<sup>29</sup>

Kester's critique of community artists need to be qualified within the context of the central role institutions play in both delineating the identities of those involved in the community partnership as well as determining the collaborative relationship. Moreover, the artist, curator, institution and community group are in the process of negotiation. At the very least, their roles and actions should be understood in relation to one another."<sup>30</sup>

Kwon proposes a "collective artistic praxis as a projective enterprise," as opposed to community-based art.<sup>31</sup> Kwon's analysis points to a vanguardism among community-based artists where the community is viewed as a blank slate through which the artist (or art institution) expresses his or her own agenda

"Community-based art," she states, "is typically understood as a *descriptive* practice in which the community functions as a referential social entity. It is an other to the artist and the art world and its identity is understood to be immanent to itself, thus available to (self-) expression. The degree of success of an art project of this kind is measured in relation to the extent in which these (self-) expressions, as signifiers of community identity, affirm rather than question the notion of a coherent collective subject."<sup>32</sup>

Kwon's collective artistic praxis allows a process of collaboration within communities that takes into consideration the fluidity and unknown of both the art-making process and its outcomes. This critique challenges anti-authoritarian artists to recognize their role in authentic engagement with a community, as they work to realize a liberatory art.<sup>33</sup>

Although art is entertaining and pleasurable, it is not unthreatening. Authentic collaborative art expands a traditional organizing approach, helping people think critically and visualize alternatives. It is used to communicate and resist, and can produce tangible outcomes. Murals are used throughout the world to visualize resistance, instill pride and convey information. During the civil rights movement singing at meetings and during protest marches both calmed and invigorated the protestors. The "Women Take Back the Night" mass march to eradicate violence against women began as a community art project. In L.A., the Bus Riders Union/Sindicato de Pasajeros collaborates with the Cornerstone Theater to develop skits about L.A. public transportation concerns. These skits are performed on the buses, which helps publicize and build support for the issues. Capoeira, originally a dance, grew into a martial art form that was used to rebel against plantation owners. Making art can be a catalyst for healing. It unifies us and reassures us of our humanity. It involves confronting fears and taking risks. It is an act of joy.

## Endnotes

1. Elizam Escobar, "Art of Liberation: A Vision of Freedom" in Jack Hirschman, ed., *Art on the Line: Essays by Artists About the Point Where Their Art & Activism Intersect* (Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 2002), 246.
2. The feminist art movement of the 70s and 80s was also influential. For more information see, Norma Broude and

Mary D. Garrard, eds., *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1994).

3. The "Wall of Respect," destroyed in 1971, is credited with revitalizing the U.S. mural movement. The mural was conceived as an aesthetic extension of the graffiti used by street gangs to identify their turf. The Blackstone Rangers, one of Chicago's most powerful gangs, sanctioned the effort and protected the Wall during the painting. See James Prigoff and Robin J. Dunitz, *Walls of Heritage/Walls of Pride: African American Murals* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Books, 2000).
4. Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002), 154.
5. Jack Hirschman, ed., *Art on the Line: Essays by Artists About the Point Where Their Art & Activism Intersect* (Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 2002), vii.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., viii.
8. Ibid., 105.
9. Nina Felshin, ed., *But Is It Art?: The Spirit of Art as Activism* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).
10. The realization that some of these exhibitions had secretly been funded by the CIA, a fact widely known by the mid-1970s, challenged the idea that art could remain separate from politics. For more on this topic see, Toby Clark, *Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 8-9.
11. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, "Freedom of the Artist: People's Artists Versus People's Rulers," in Jack Hirschman, ed., *Art on the Line: Essays by Artists About the Point Where Their Art & Activism Intersect* (Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 2002), 206.
12. Ibid., 207
13. Ibid., 208
14. I am thinking here about the NEA Four controversy around "Freedom of Expression." In June 1990, John Frohnmayer, then Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, vetoed four grants after they were recommended for awards by the NEA peer review panel. The controversial performance artists were singled out due to their sexual orientations and political discourses. Three of the rejected artists are queer and deal with queer issues in their work; the fourth is an outspoken feminist. The endowment had been under attack since 1989 for funding "lewd" work. All members of the NEA Four received compensation surpassing their grant amounts in 1993 when courts ruled in support of the four artists.

*Notes Continued on page 56*



# The Legacy of the Lodges: Mutual Aid and Consumer Society

by Eric Laursen

They had funny names: the Odd Fellows, the Fraternal Order of Eagles, the Knights of Pythias, the Loyal Order of Moose, the Household of Ruth, the International Order of Twelve Knights and Daughters of Tabor. They observed quasi-mystical rituals and customs, greeted each other with secret handshakes and were often known for their bizarre headgear that included antlers, fezes, and pseudo-Native American headdresses.

Even in their heyday they made a sweet target for easy-chair social commentators like H.L. Mencken, who saw them as typifying the sheep-like American "joiner" and mocked their eccentric ceremonies. "Ten iron-molders meet in the back-room of a near-beer saloon, organize a lodge of the Noble and Mystic Order of American Rosicrucians, and elect a wheelwright Supreme Worthy Whimwham," Mencken scoffed.<sup>1</sup>

But fraternal orders (which also included women's organizations) were an enormous social force among American working people in the first half of the 20th Century—nearly as significant as labor unions. Also known as mutual aid societies, their defining features were "an autonomous system of lodges, a democratic form of internal government, a ritual, and the provision of mutual aid for members and their families."<sup>2</sup> Fraternal orders were astonishingly diverse, self-selecting their members by geography, ethnicity, religion, or, like the Odd Fellows, nearly no criteria at all except "good character." When the movement peaked in the early 1930s, fraternal orders had as many as thirty five million members. The biggest order, the Masons, claimed over twelve percent of all white American adults as initiates, as well as a fair—if segregated—percentage of black males.

The legions who joined the fraternal orders were not anarchists. The orders tended to be organized in a rigidly hierarchical way, and their leaders loved to underscore their Americanism and denounce radicals and revolutionaries. But perhaps they protested a bit too much. Anarchists have always projected mutual aid as the basic organizing principle of a non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian society. And despite their many defects, the fraternal orders carried out perhaps the most ambitious experiment in mutual aid in U.S. history—a

*From Mutual Aid to Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967*

By David T. Beito

Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000

*A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*

By Lizabeth Cohen

New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003

*The Consumer Society Reader*

By Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt (editors)

New York: The New Press, 2000

project that cut across classes and gave immigrants and people of color a tool for advancing themselves when government and the capitalist business structure were both geared to keep them in their place.

The orders provided a powerful demonstration that mutual aid could serve as an alternative method for organizing a complex modern society. And at least in embryo, they had the potential to

supplant the government-run social-services system that evolved during the New Deal (and is now under attack from the right ) with a decentralized, democratically run model that tied local mutual aid societies together in loose, cooperative national confederations. Undoubtedly, few lodge brothers or sisters ever thought of themselves as social revolutionaries. But their project made them fellow travelers of a sort, unwittingly providing a rebuke to free-market theorists who asserted that only an economic model built around corporate competition—not cooperation—could adequately provide for its members' needs.

The basic purpose of the orders was to enable working people to pool their financial resources to supply each other with essentials that the state and the capitalists would not, including life insurance, pensions, cradle-to-grave medical care, and homes and schools for destitute family members. Members paid dues, usually modest, to support these services, which sometimes included their own hospitals, clinics, orphanages, and schools. And unlike private employers, the orders fought hard and usually succeeded in keeping their promises to their members even when times were bad.

Together with labor unions, agricultural cooperatives, and the budding feminist and African American liberation movements, some observers saw the orders as an unmistakable sign that society was evolving beyond the stage where capitalists could rationally claim that economic competition was the only way for the human race to progress. In his conclusion to *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902),<sup>3</sup> Kropotkin predicted that "the mutual aid tendency" would one day break down the "iron rules" of the state. Already, he wrote, it manifests itself "in an infinity of associations which now tend to embrace all aspects of life and to take possession of all that is required by man [sic] for life and

for reproducing the waste occasioned by life.” Less than ten years later, by a conservative estimate, one third of all adult males in the U.S. over nineteen were members of a fraternal “lodge.”

The mutual aid movement was derailed by a complicated series of developments that went hand-in-hand with the rise of the welfare state and the privatization of public space after World War II. On a deeper level, though, the culprit was the corporate colonization of desire: American business’s seemingly endless outpouring of dream machines, from the automobile to the shopping mall to movies and television, that decentered towns and urban neighborhoods and pulled workers away from the communities that had once been their primary source of identity.

Understanding how the mutual aid society faded into the consumer society can help us to define our options today for reviving the project to create a radically democratic, cooperative world of autonomous communities and individuals. Three recent books provide a good starting-point: David T. Beito’s *From Mutual Aid to Welfare State* (2000), Lizabeth Cohen’s *A Consumer’s Republic* (2003), and Juliet B. Schor’s and Douglas B. Holt’s collection, *The Consumer Society* (2000). Together, they form a substantial history of the destruction of mutual aid institutions and their replacement by a corporate world in which people no longer determine the nature of their own desires but are manipulated into desiring a hodge-podge of consumer products—a world that cripples their ability to consider what their “real” desires may be.

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Beito’s book is especially valuable, offering the first reasonably comprehensive portrait of how American fraternal orders practiced mutual aid. It is easy to idealize the orders, which had plenty of failings. Some poorly run orders swindled their members or lost their money. They were rigidly segregated, excluding blacks and other minorities. They relegated women to secondary roles as “auxiliaries” and rigorously excluded anyone they deemed not to be of good character—i.e., jobless, politically radical, or in any way not in keeping with middle class values. They went out of their way to denounce anarchism, socialism and any other “un-American” beliefs, even though they embodied some of those movements’ key aspirations. While they spanned many social classes, in practice the richest members tended to dominate lodge government. And they were politically myopic, siding, for instance, with their enemies in the commercial insurance industry and the American Medical Association (AMA) to squash a “socialist” campaign for a national health care system during World War I.

But this doesn’t tell the whole story. African Americans formed their own mutual aid societies, and in fact a greater proportion of black working males than whites belonged to a lodge. Immigrants—Jews, Irish, Hispanic and many others—formed lodges as well, often with a more politically radical ideology. Women had their own orders, which not only provided the usual benefits but sometimes offered training in marketable business skills as well. Like the larger “mainstream” orders, all made a strong distinction between mutual aid and “charity,” which American workers feared would make them dependent on the government or on rich benefactors.

This distinction meant that the social services offered by fraternal orders were generally more progressive than those local governments provided, Beito argues, because they served brothers and sisters—not charity cases. At a time when orphanages were notoriously cruel institutions, the Moose and the Security Benefit Association ran homes and schools for deceased members’ children that deemphasized the heavy moralizing typical of such institutions and produced far better-educated, better-prepared adults. Often they had room for widows as well. The Modern Woodmen of America ran a well-regarded tuberculosis sanitarium. And the Taborites, a black order, provided one of the few well-equipped and staffed hospitals in the South for African Americans. In all cases, the sense of fraternity—of mutual obligation to support brothers and sisters in need—was a strong factor.

Most crucially, the orders gave ordinary workers a haven from the increasing hegemony of big business over the necessities of life and the production of new desires. A little background history is helpful. Fraternal orders originated in England in the early 18th century, when the old paternalistic rural society was breaking up and large-scale industrialization was just beginning to be glimpsed. Orders like the Masons and the Odd Fellows partially replaced the social safety net that was disintegrating as centuries-old communities broke up and the urban megalopolis appeared. Immigrants imported the lodge system to America, Australia, and elsewhere.

The orders were not an anachronism. They were a parallel development to the capitalist economy, a long-term effort to adapt the concept of mutual aid to the conditions of a complex, interlinked modern economy. As corporate America expanded in the early 20th Century, capitalists who wanted to build businesses in sectors dominated by the mutual aid societies attacked them with all the ferocity of Dick Cheney going after alternative energy producers. The AMA fought the fraternal orders over their practice of hiring doctors for individual lodges, which helped them to control medical costs. Big insurance companies, some of which started out as mutual aid societies, fought them over every type of insurance they

tried to extend to their members. Yet in most cases, dues-paying lodge members received comparable or better benefits at a lower cost than other workers.

Historians tend to point to the Depression as the era of decline of the fraternal orders, although some continued to provide the same set of benefits to a dwindling number of members into the 1960s. Many were forced to raise their dues, leaving jobless members unable to pay—even though all the biggest orders found ways not to cut benefits. Government-run social programs, especially Social Security, unemployment insurance and Aid to Families with Dependent Children, diminished the need for independent mutual aid societies. And when the government started providing tax credits for employers to create pension and health benefit plans for their workers, many companies jumped at the offer since it meant they could effectively defer a portion of workers' wages until after they retired.

Three other factors were involved as well. The 1920s finalized America's first great period of mass migration from cities to suburbs. This exacerbated class stratification, and where wealthy citizens had once looked to boost their community prestige by assuming prominent posts in lodges that included every segment of the community, now they wanted to belong to something more exclusive. So the lodges started losing their most affluent members to a new breed of "service" organizations, including the Lions and Kiwanis, which offered no mutual aid benefits but instead concentrated on charity work. This left the lodges more financially vulnerable and deprived them of many influential supporters.

Even as lodge membership was peaking, however, it was clear that the fraternal orders weren't going to pull themselves together to create a larger vision of a decentralized society. Though as many as one out in three working households were connected to a benefits-paying lodge in some way, the leadership of the orders seems never to have contemplated launching a systematic campaign to make their program universal—to seek out communities that did not have their own mutual aid societies and help them to set up their own structures. They also never tried to work together cooperatively to extend the facilities in which they specialized—a TB sanitarium, a home nursing service—to other orders so as to build larger mutual aid networks. Was this just because of their leaders' political and social conservatism? Or because the orders themselves were afraid of surrendering some part of their autonomy? Unfortunately, Beito doesn't address these issues.

The third factor that led to the orders' decline was consumerism. A decade later, in the midst of the Depression, economists recognized the role workers could play in ending

the economic meltdown by raising their demand for consumer products. During the so-called Second New Deal of 1938-41, the Roosevelt administration pushed through emergency appropriations specifically aimed at putting cash in people's pockets so they could buy things. "The prosperity of this nation is built upon spending, not saving"<sup>4</sup> became the new orthodoxy, and it has remained so for government economists to this day.

Cohen picks up the story in *A Consumer's Republic*. The Depression sparked the second of three 20th Century consumer movement "waves" in the U.S., she explains. An earlier one had focused on factory conditions, and the later wave of the 1960s and 1970s would center on product safety. But the consumer movement of the Depression, still in touch with the mutual aid tradition, was perhaps the most radical of all. It included mass boycotts of stores that "price-gouged," sit-ins and consumer strikes in black communities against stores that refused to hire African Americans, and large-scale efforts to set up buying cooperatives and consumer-owned stores. Not surprisingly, business denounced such actions as un-American and consumer activists—often largely women—as "reds." Business won the battle shortly after World War II ended, when consumerists tried and failed to preserve wartime price controls that had sheltered workers from profiteers.

Cohen doesn't say so explicitly, but she makes a strong case that the rise of the consumer society after the war was the death blow to mutual aid and the fraternal orders. For reasons that she does not explain fully, real estate developers even before the war ended began promoting single-family, suburban homes—rather than "traditional" city or country living—as the ideal for returning GIs and the families they were expected to start. An automobile was assumed to accompany each home. And each home came ready for the new owners to fill up with exciting new consumer durables like electric refrigerators, toasters, and lawn sprinklers. ("That little home sketched there in the sand is a symbol of faith and hope and courage. It's a promise, too," read a magazine ad for General Electric appliances.<sup>5</sup>)

Consciously or not, manufacturers and developers were sculpting a new model of American life that included more easily obtainable credit, more dispersed housing patterns and a chance to move out of one's class—if one were white and male, at least. This new model left little room for mutual aid organizations. Separating households from close-knit communities made lodges more difficult to organize. And it replaced reliance on the fraternal obligation to support each other's families with a new faith in property values, government-funded benefits, and the never-ending expansion of the consumer economy.

Like the fraternal orders, however, the new “consumers’ republic” was based to some extent on a utopian vision. Social classes and racial divisions would not matter so much in a society that was geared for growth and needed people to invent and produce a never-ending stream of consumer goods, its promoters promised. The difference was that we would shop for the things the fraternal orders had once provided as a mutual obligation.

“In reconstructing the nation after World War II,” Cohen argues, “leaders of business, government, and labor developed a political economy and a political culture that expected a dynamic mass consumption economy not only to deliver prosperity, but also to fulfill American society’s loftier aspirations: more social egalitarianism, more democratic participation, and more political freedom.”<sup>6</sup>

It didn’t work out that way. The ‘burbs quickly became just as rigidly divided between haves and have-nots as white residents fought savage battles against integration in the 1950s and 1960s. One of the strengths of Cohen’s book is her focus on the new postwar suburbs, showing that while the most visible battles for racial equality were fought at the federal level (*Brown v. Board of Education*, the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965), some of the most important took place in the courts and state legislatures, and centered on local zoning fights. It was a difficult war of inches, and while integration won in some places, white flight often turned victories into long-term defeats. In the end, the kind of ethnic and geographic solidarity that had once strengthened the fraternal orders remained to some extent, only now its main expression was in the NIMBY (“not in my backyard”) spirit of the postwar suburbs and affluent urban neighborhoods—not in mutual aid.

Meanwhile, jobs and access to commercial establishments became the focus of the mainstream civil rights movement. In southern cities, Woolworth’s refusal to seat black customers at its lunch counters sparked protests and sit-ins, for example. After buses, schools, and hospitals were integrated, civil rights activists turned to businesses that failed to serve the needs of African American consumers. Many black activists found their voices through boycotts, sit-ins and other mass actions in which they demanded equal access to the goods that defined the middle class. And the inner city riots of the 1960s expressed a deep anger not just at the state’s neglect of services for people of color but at retail businesses’ unfair treatment of them as consumers. But business quickly found ways to refigure the black liberation movement, women’s liberation, and most every other movement for social and economic justice that arose during and after the 1960s as a potential audience for new products and new approaches to selling and branding.

Some movement groups, including but not limited to the Black Panther Party and the women’s movement, created an extraordinary publishing, musical, and artistic scene outside of corporate control in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and acted on the need to revive the mutual aid project—to produce their own food, culture, and other necessities, to address health and family issues directly through the community rather than through the market. But a long period of economic and wage stagnation that began in the early 1970s strangled many of these efforts, and unemployment and an increasingly reactionary government left workers ever more dependent on the good graces of the corporation.

And so the colonization of desire continued on its way, even though the more utopian vision of the consumers’ republic died. What we got instead was the consumer society. Schor and Holt’s collection assembles almost 150 years of writings on the subject, from Marx (“The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret”) to social observers Betty Friedan and Thomas Frank to postmodern thinkers Pierre Bourdieu and Jean Baudrillard. Their chapters explain how consumerism works and maintains its hold on us, if not how to combat it and develop alternatives.

With all their faults, the old fraternal orders offered a kind of model for a society in which mutual aid provides for each according to his or her needs. Death benefits, health care, and even some form of ritual—however hokey—that makes us feel part of a community are desires that connect directly with our needs as human beings. But that’s not what’s important to the capitalist. “In a free enterprise economy,” the head of a “motivational research operation” told Friedan, “we have to develop the need for new products. And to do that we have to liberate women to desire these new products. We help them to rediscover that homemaking is more creative than to compete with men. This can be manipulated. We sell them what they ought to want, speed up the unconscious, move it along.”<sup>7</sup> (Note the use of the word “liberate.”)

A few years before Friedan exposed the marketing of “womanhood” in *The Feminine Mystique*, economist John Kenneth Galbraith identified the basic paradox behind such tropes of Madison Avenue and gave this phenomenon a name: the “dependency effect.” When the main goal of life is a higher and higher standard of living, Galbraith wrote in *The Affluent Society*, manufacturers do not simply create products to satisfy demands, but create new desires to be fulfilled by the products they manufacture: “The fact that wants can be synthesized by advertising, catalyzed by salesmanship, and shaped by the discreet manipulation of the persuaders shows that they are not very urgent.”<sup>8</sup> But over time they tend to become urgent, even necessary, as manufacturers find ways to channel

more needs through them. The result, Galbraith concluded, is a "model of the good society" based on "the squirrel wheel."

In the 1980s and 1990s, as manufacturers and the burgeoning financial services industry concentrated more and more of their attention on "high net-worth customers," the "aspirational gap" created by this system engendered ever more exaggerated notions of what's "adequate" for a good life. Schor notes that one survey found the level of income needed to fulfill one's dreams doubled between 1986 and 1994, to twice the median household income. Bankruptcies have soared too, not surprisingly. Meanwhile, the richest subsection of Americans scheme to pass laws making it easier for them to amass their fortunes tax-free, even as they rush ahead to create new aspirations for the rest of us to catch up to.<sup>9</sup>

There's no way to know if this treadmill-like society, with its obsessive focus on growth no matter what the direction or what the cost—social, psychological, environmental—would not have come to be had the mutual aid societies survived. Maybe it's a coincidence that two of the benefits the fraternal orders typically provided their members were life insurance and health care: the one nearly impossible for an older blue collar worker to obtain today and the other rapidly becoming too expensive for anyone but a millionaire.

Cohen and Schor do not address the possible connection. And they have little to say about how the consumer society can be tamed or turned back other than some modest public policy prescriptions: government income transfers or vouchers to guarantee a basic standard of living, for example, or a revival of the third-wave consumer movement demand for a cabinet-level consumer advocate. "Separating the citizen from the consumer would involve severing a linkage that has only solidified over the course of the twentieth century,"<sup>10</sup> Cohen concludes, depressingly.

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The biggest failing of the prewar mutual aid network was its parochialism. A diverse collection of lodges and orders focused narrowly on providing only for their own members' needs and self-selected those members to fit a narrow conception of who belonged and who didn't. The result: not just racism and rigid gender division, but failure to understand the revolutionary impact of their own method of organizing. There were exceptions: Beito describes the Taborites' role in supporting the civil rights movement, although he provides too little discussion of the Jewish *Arbeter Stimme* (to which both Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman belonged) and other overtly anti-capitalist orders.

But the big unanswered question remains: what might have happened if the fraternal orders had pulled together to spread the ideal of mutual aid more widely, perhaps extending it to the entire U.S. working population? At least until the later years of the Depression, this was not out of the question. Certainly the fraternal orders' rivals, especially in the insurance industry, did their best to discredit them and limit their ability to provide certain kinds of benefits.

Perhaps more critically, however, the business people who tended to snag the top positions in the lodges weren't interested in—and perhaps were personally afraid of—the wider implications of the mutual aid model. The result was that despite their success at demonstrating mutual aid's ability to meet community needs in a complex society, the fraternal orders never attempted to challenge the emerging hegemony of business. They never developed a conscious political critique of capitalism, such as that articulated by anarchists and socialists. And they rarely tried to extend their success at providing social insurance to actual manufacturing—which would probably have necessitated linking up with the labor movement and, at least presumptively, endorsing the notion of class struggle.

In the end, the conservative thinking of the orders' hierarchical leadership, intent on proving that lodge brothers and sisters were not un-American, fatally limited its vision. The "need to nourish the most utopian desires" was not a principle the lodge potentates could even approach without jeopardizing the social standing they sought by taking these positions in the first place.

For anarchists and other anti-authoritarians today, the problem is not so much hierarchical leadership. But the movement has its own tendencies toward parochialism—to mistake the need to maintain the principle of individual free association and affinity group solidarity for a license to neglect the need to confederate.

Unless the movement can learn how to generate and sustain larger voluntary structures through its affinity groups and regional networks, it risks once again being outflanked by the state and the capitalist establishment, just as the fraternal orders were. And it risks confronting its own members with a dead-end choice between confining their work and passion to limited organizing among a small subgroup of self-selected activists, or else shifting their energies to groups with a non-anarchist approach but a commitment to accomplishing more far-reaching projects.

The history of the American mutual aid societies, and their collapse in the face of a jacked-up state system and super-charged consumer capitalism during the immediate pre- and



post-war years, point to the challenge today's autonomist collectives must overcome. Samuel Gompers, a lifelong Mason, fiercely opposed national health care and government-funded pension as president of the American Federation of Labor, arguing that workers should provide these things for themselves. Undoubtedly he was right, since the state is now attempting to wriggle out of any such obligations.

But the labor movement never succeeded in creating a health and old-age benefit system that provided for all workers, either. Today, mutual aid still appears to be the only way to create a humane, caring, and fully participatory society. But anarchists have not begun to consider their biggest challenge yet: how to make mutual aid *universal*. This doesn't mean the movement needs to renounce the autonomist principle—only that it needs to take confederalism just as seriously.

#### Endnotes

- 1 Quoted in Richard Brookhiser, "Ancient, Earnest, Secret and Fraternal," *Civilization*, August 1, 1999.
- 2 David T. Beito, *From Mutual Aid to Welfare State: Fraternal Societies and Social Services, 1890-1967* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 1.
- 3 Peter Kropotkin, *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution*, 1914 edition (Boston: Extending Horizon Books), 294.
- 4 Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 55.
- 5 Ibid., 72.
- 6 Ibid., 403.
- 7 Juliet B. Schor and Douglas B. Holt, Eds., *The Consumer Society Reader* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 41-2. Selection from Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1963).
- 8 Schor and Holt, 23. Selection from John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958).
- 9 The same week I read *From Mutual Aid to Welfare State*, I spotted a newspaper article about a new trend among homeowners to renovate their homes over and over. "It's all a stepped-up version of '90s disposable décor," the article explained, "when retailers like Pottery Barn pushed homeowners to think of furniture like fashion—but now it's for stuff like windows, cabinets and doors" (Sarah Robertson, "Out With the Old," *Wall Street Journal*, June 18, 2003). Homeowners, presumably, had to be "liberated" to not regard their cabinets, windows, and doors as permanent.
- 10 Elizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*, 409.

#### Notes continued from page 50

15. Toby Clark, *Art and Propaganda in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997), 18-19.
16. Elizam Escobar, "Art of Liberation: A Vision of Freedom" in Jack Hirschman, ed., *Art on the Line, Essays by Artists about the Point Where Their Art & Activism Intersect* (Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 2002), 248-249.
17. Ibid., 248.
18. Susan Sherman, Kimiko Hahn and Gale Jackson, "Three Voices/Together: A Collage," in Jack Hirschman, ed., *Art on the Line, Essays by Artists About the Point Where Their Art & Activism Intersect* (Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 2002), 340-341.
19. Susan Sherman, Kimiko Hahn and Gale Jackson, "Three Voices/Together: A Collage," in Jack Hirschman, ed., *Art on the Line, Essays by Artists About the Point Where Their Art & Activism Intersect* (Willimantic, Connecticut: Curbstone Press, 2002), 327.
20. In looking at the role of the arts in oppressed communities, we see art as functional—a tool that is implemented to both create a coherent identity and as a subversive instrument.
21. Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002), 60.
22. Ibid., 3.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 105-106. Also see Suzanne Lacy, ed., *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).
25. "Culture in Action" took place from 1992 through 1993. Sponsored by Sculpture Chicago, Culture in Action intended to respond to what curators' viewed as the imposition, elitism and inaccessibility of public art. For more information see *Culture In Action*, exhibition catalog (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).
26. Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002), 139.
27. Ibid., 112-113.
28. Ibid., 153.
29. Ibid., 142.
30. Ibid., 141-142.
31. Ibid., 154.
32. Ibid.
33. Thanks to Ashanti Alston and Kazembe Balagoon for helpful discussions on this topic.

# Spaces of Solidarity: Infoshops, the Suburbs, and the French Revolution

by Lesley Wood

I don't think I'm alone in finding it difficult to bring my organizing and my reading together. As a result, I really appreciate it when books come out that allow me to step back and think more generally about when and how political mobilization happens. Sometimes thousands of newly

energized people show up and campaigns explode into feverish activity, at other times activism deteriorates into a morass of accusations and paralysis. Why? As organizers and activists we have to be engaged with the day-to-day work—our strategies are often limited to thinking about budgets, allies, and targets. Unsurprisingly we are less sensitive to the large scale ebbs and flows of political protest, and how these limit or help us. Studies of past movements can be useful in helping us to see that big picture.

*Insurgent Identities* and *Schism and Solidarity* are two books that cast a keen eye towards the rise and fall of popular movements in nineteenth century France. But these are not simply histories of long ago and far away, they systematically collect and analyze information on the patterns of protest and social life and build models of mobilization that are useful for thinking about organizing today. They attempt to offer answers to the key questions—what allows people to assume a revolutionary identity, and why do organizations split and schism at some moments, and engage in firm solidarity at others? Examining organizational voting, housing, marriage and arrest records, both emphasize the relevance of day-to-day relationships for understanding movement activity. Both also share the conclusion that the interactions of diverse groups of people in shared spaces allow for more durable alliances, and underpin rapid direct action. Such a finding clearly argues that activists need to work to create these shared spaces, whether in coalitions, at actions that involve diverse collaboration, or even in alternative institutions such as infoshops, as long as they engage multiple communities. It is these spaces that help organizations and movements, especially during periods of declining mobilization, avoid the schisms that are so common when organizers burn out after intense periods of engagement.

Roger Gould's *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* compares the "workers" uprising of 1848 to the Paris Commune of 1871. He asks what structural and material changes took place between the two events that led to changes in the ways that

*Insurgent Identities: Class, Community and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune*

By Roger Gould

University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1995

*Schism and Solidarity in Social Movements: The Politics of Labor in the French Third Republic*

By Christopher K. Ansell

Cambridge: Cambridge 2001

people understood their political participation. How did these changes in identity influence the ways Parisians participated in political action? In contrast to previous studies, Gould argues that while the population mobilized as "workers against capitalism" in 1848, by 1871 class

consciousness was not a major source of political action. Many people had built relationships outside of their class and occupational niches. Instead, the people of Paris had come to see themselves primarily as "urban dwellers against a centralized state." The source of the difference between the two uprisings was the physical transformation of Paris associated with Baron Haussmann. Like development companies of today working New York's Lower East Side, the Baron had cleared out many of the central working class districts, and doubled the average width of the city's streets in order to facilitate the movement of troops and cannons. These changes pushed thousands of less affluent residents into the periphery where they formed new spaces of identity that were more neighborhood than class oriented.

The impact of such redevelopment can be understood by looking at the link between day-to-day relationships and political identities. Gould notes that while all people have multiple identities, only some are activated through social relationships at any moment. In order to understand the ways identities are related to political action, Gould introduces the concept of "participation identity," that he defines as "the social identification with respect to which an individual responds in a given instance of social protest to specific normative and instrumental appeals"(13). In other words, whether someone responds to statements like, "the capitalists are exploiting the workers like us!" Or, "People like us have a right to defend ourselves from the federal government." How do people respond to particular ways of representing their interests, and norms? In contrast to frameworks that assume, "you work therefore you're not the elite therefore you're working class therefore you'll respond to political speeches, flyers, and newspapers that call you working class," Gould asks, "who are your friends," "who do you live near?" and "who do you identify with." The particular relationships potential protesters engage in provide a means of assessing the validity of a collective identity such as worker, student, or city dweller, and these same relationships then offer a means for acting to defend that "participation identity" and pushing others to do so. Gould looks at how marriage records

(who did the couple ask to be their witness?) and housing patterns to learn how Parisians in both time periods interacted. He found that by 1871, working Parisians friends and neighbors were mixed in terms of class. He noted that formal neighborhood organizations helped emphasize this mixed class “urban dweller” identity by forging relations among people who weren’t already linked and building the possibility of collective action. Leading up to the Paris Commune, these organizations developed out of public meetings that brought people in suburban neighborhoods together, and built a sense of “the people,” facilitated by police harassment. When the French state tried to abolish the popular National Guard, composed of locals from many of these suburban neighborhoods, these communities reacted quickly and the Paris Commune was born.

This notion of “participation identity” is interesting to consider. What are the relevant identities that people identify with? Who are the “We” in “We the People?” Some of the most hotly defended identities in the United States and Canada today appear to be athletic, consumer-driven, or religiously based. What does this mean for our campaigns? One of the most striking things to me about the massive anti-war mobilizations last spring was the way people in the New York began to see protest as somehow “American.” After the permit allowing protesters to march in New York was denied, many began to describe protesting as patriotic. As one student argued; “everyone should have had an American flag!” While I find such an idea problematic in many ways, the launch of United for Peace and Justice’s advertising campaign “Peace is Patriotic” recognized its power.

Are the identities (and groups?) that many of us work with broad enough (anarchist, activist, anti-globalization, radical, even liberal) to allow many to identify with us? Even if they are, are there enough social ties to allow people who are willing to commit to make the transition from identification to action? These efforts to build a united front need not be hierarchical. Social Forums like New York’s are trying to build ties across communities to make city-wide collaboration more possible. But do we need a single, broad identity to organize around? Or is there some way to build a “federated identity” of people who share a critique of the system while maintaining different visions? Is there a way to respect the different ways people participate and fulfill Zapatista idea of “One No, Many Yeses.”



Regardless, Gould’s book underscores the importance listening to how potential protesters define themselves, their interests, and their lives. If we want to organize here and now, we need to be tied into how people live in that same time and place. Organizing campaigns cannot be transferred across the city, country, or globe. There are no master plans that work everywhere and at any time.

The other book, *Schism and Solidarity in Social Movements: The Politics of Labor in the French Third Republic*, is a rich, complex re-telling of a period I had little knowledge of. Like many of us, my reading of French history ends with the Paris Commune, and then skips forward to World War I. This book looks at the period in between 1871 and 1921. How did workers that had lived through total social transformation become the “double” track of French labor movement—massive industrial unions alongside radical grassroots militancy? How did much of the energy that overthrew successive governments become transferred into party organizing?

While this book presents a slightly overwhelming history of the various factions, parties, and radical leaders, Ansell’s main question is a timeless one; why do labor movements sometimes exhibit broad based solidarity and at other times dissolve into antagonistic factions? He argues that *bourses de travail* that operated as job placement centers for a range of unions provided the opportunity for workers from multiple trades and crafts to interact, providing a local, militant counterweight to the national organizations of sectoral unions and political parties. The opportunity the bourses offered for solidarity to be built between workers inadvertently limited the schisms and in-fighting at the national level. Similar to Gould, he looks for recurrent patterns in networks, and links changes in local level organizations and political attitudes to shifts in national-level organizations and their ideological evolution.

In his exploration of unity and autonomy—a debate as relevant to our own movements as it was for nineteenth century France—Ansell raises three points I found particularly useful. First, he emphasizes waves and cycles of protest, second he discusses the three ways schism emerged, and finally he notes the significance of the “shared spaces” for broad based solidarity. I’ll go through each in turn.

In the midst of organizational retreats and e-mail flame wars we often forget that decline in mobilization is tied to

schism and discord. Again and again it happens—protests decline in number and everyone blames everyone else. Max Elbaum's book *Revolution in the Air* masterfully captures this process in the 1970s, as the activists of the 1960s attempted to root out the ideological, organizational, and personal "flaws" that had kept the revolution from happening. Ansell notes that groups have an increased tendency to schism when there is tension with the dominant culture and members or leaders can be accused of being impure, co-opted or insufficiently oppositional.

We can look at the anti-globalization movement in North America as a recent example. Building up to and immediately after Seattle, diverse coalitions formed, in part through Direct Action Network coalitions in over a dozen cities across the USA. In New York, over one hundred people began to meet weekly. As time passed, the numbers declined in all cities and the remaining members engaged in a range of strategies in order to maintain the survival of the organization.

Ansell's discussion of the three ways schisms developed in 19th century labor movements suggests that different responses to waning participation will lead to the different strategies of routinization, communal closure, and inverted hierarchy.(231) These different strategies will lead to corresponding schisms. These processes are familiar to many of us, although they may not be the only ways organizations fall apart. Routinization is the first response Ansell discusses to declining participation, exhaustion, and burnout. Often this turns on a desire to find a way to sustain the organization without such active participation. This can lead to introducing membership dues, hiring staff, and it typically leads to a moderation of goals (229).

Communal closure is a different response. Also resulting from burnout and declining mobilization, activists will work to maintain the deep sense of emotional commitment experienced during the upswing of the movement. Rather than choosing pragmatic organizational maintenance, this approach favors strategies that highlight the "us-them" distinction. Activists previously affiliated with a range of community, workplace, and issue-based organizations and identities became the "anti-globalization activists" after Seattle. Groups following this path tend to draw up statements of unity, close themselves or limit access to new members and engage in sustained critique of movements and organizations previously seen as allies.

We saw dramatic evidence of this in New York, especially after September 11th, 2001—with a rapid increase of closed affinity groups and reading circles.<sup>1</sup> Often "an internal hierarchy is erected to exert discipline and control within the group and over affiliated groups." (230) This hierarchy can

be formal or informal. Many of us have been in groups that endure this shift away from action and towards intensive internal and external critique and a subsequent narrowing of appropriate activity.

The third response to declining mobilization is a reaction against "communal closure." It generally involves "celebrating the very aspects of social engagement that communal closure seeks to sublimate; spontaneity, intuition and authenticity." (230) Activists engaging in this response revel in refusing to conform to "appropriate behavior." This behavior often leads to its own type of dogmatic and exclusive behavior and a schism. If communal closure seeks to maintain commitment by organizing it hierarchically, countermobilization vehemently rejects formal organization that is not absolutely egalitarian. Ansell describes this third process as "inverted hierarchy" and says this places the weight of action entirely on individual will. He notes that in the French labor movement, this countermobilization is exemplified by anarchists and the anarcho-syndicalists (230). However there appears to be some conflation here between issues of equality and individualism, and correspondingly—hierarchy and tightly bounded organization. This is a product of the case examined—in which "communal closure" most often takes the form of political parties, and "countermobilization" the form of the local, egalitarian *bourses* reacting against those parties. Those of us who have spent any time on the anti-authoritarian left could easily imagine a case of "communal closure" for an egalitarian organization. One doesn't need to be a political party to become exclusionary.

Not only a history of fragmentation, *Schism and Solidarity* tells us how schism was avoided and solidarity was built through "balanced dualism." Balanced dualism requires overcoming the structural and ideological dualisms—and realigning the "us-versus-them" boundary. This realignment is facilitated by cross-cutting economic, friendship, or cultural networks that bridge divisions that would otherwise be vulnerable to schism. In nineteenth century France, Ansell sees the labor exchanges or *bourses de travail* as sites that allow for the development of such networks. These job placement centers were developed as a response to unemployment, but inadvertently encouraged the unification of trade unions across their political divisions and around a local, territorial model of union organization(14). Their rise realigned the labor movement in France away from more hierarchical unions and political parties.

In addition to providing housing for traveling workers, technical training and libraries, strike funds and consumer cooperatives, the *bourses* became a headquarters for local federations of unions (111). They also became specialists in

strikes (112). The general strike was a symbol, in part in seeking to invert the hierarchy of political party over union, but it was also an ecumenical activity in reaching out across party boundaries. The potentially unifying character of the general strike was visible right from the start, and it was claimed that “all the groups without distinction of school should rally to it.” On July 20 1891, just after a meeting of the *bourse*, police noted that “there is a pow-wow between several anarchists and independent revolutionaries... They spoke of strikes and took a firm resolution to support all of them... in order to arrive at the general strike” (120).

Those who have engaged in direct action are aware of the unifying nature of mass protest for participants. Gould might suggest that it can be the moment that a “participation identity” becomes strongest. Strikes as “revolutionary gymnastics” spread wildly through France, facilitated by the networks of *bourses*, but later declined amidst debates over the relationship between party and union.

The same debate ended the wave of general strikes that took place in Ontario during 1996 and 1997. After city after city was brought to a halt by the labor movement and its community allies in opposition to cuts to social services, and massive proposed layoffs of the provincial government, the groundbreaking Metro Days of Action took place. On the first day, transit was halted, all unionized workers refused to work, and the city was silenced, except for the step of picket lines. The Teamsters were rumored to have shut down the highways using tractor trailers. The next day 250,000 marched through the streets for hours. The speakers from the podium vowed that the next step would be a province wide shut down. But nothing happened. The labor movement was stymied by the same debate that had divided the movement in France at the end of the 19th century. Were the parties a tool of the union, or the unions the tool of the parties? The labor movement couldn't decide whether its goal was to get the quasi-socialist New Democratic Party elected. Schism took place, and with it, demobilization, massive layoffs, and a gutting of the welfare state.

Ansell's research suggests we need to think seriously about the role of local institutions in avoiding such scenarios. Again I think of the movement around social forums, but also infoshops, community centers, and grassroots coalitions. These efforts allow a counter-weight to nationally directed, professionalized organizations and hierarchical unions and political parties. One recent attempt to develop a federated structure of local coalitions was the Direct Action Network. Imagined as local spokescouncils of diverse groups, they quickly transformed into organizations rooted most often in the environmental, direct action, and student movements. “DAN people” quickly came to represent a particular modus

operandi—and however attractive to people like myself, they failed as enduring cross-movement coalitions. Interestingly, the DAN branches that lasted longest—New York and Chicago appeared to most likely to fulfill the condition of “balanced dualism”—both were known for working with groups that reached outside the usual direct action constituencies to labor and the movement against police brutality.

In his tale of solidarity and schism, Ansell celebrates diverse, local solidarity and its ability to build powerful strike waves. As an anti-authoritarian, I sympathize with his bias. But I wonder, is schism always bad? He notes that like divorce, sometimes schism is liberating—but what are the implications of this? Are there moments that schism and sectarianism can create the opportunities for more long term solidarity? More work is needed on this question.

Christopher Ansell and the late Roger Gould have provided us some of the best historical sociology being written in recent years. The books, despite their density, are rich and sophisticated in their blending of data, method, and theory, and applicable to current struggles. These books are not for those looking for a quick, easy read. But if you're interested in history and the integration of theory and data, do not give these a miss. They challenge more simplistic explanations of class struggle and revolution with their emphasis on micro-level relationships and processes of identity construction and action. This might dismay some but we should celebrate that, according to Ansell and Gould, our coalitions, infoshops, and community meetings might just be creating the conditions for more than “revolutionary gymnastics.”

## Endnotes

- 1 This was also due to an increased but related concern about security issues.

*Notes continued from page 45*

- levels of commodity output, which usually means greater profitability than in the case of enterprises that primarily use human labor to produce commodities (so that wages comprise the higher cost of production).
6. Bertell Ollman, Ed., *Market Socialism: The Debate among Socialists* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 59.
7. James A. Yunker, *On the Political Economy of Market Socialism: Essays and Analyses*, (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 21.
8. Ibid.
9. See M. Postone, *Time, Labor and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory*, (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).



# Magonismo: An Overview

by Chuck Morse

Ricardo Flores Magón is one of the most important anarchists in the history of the Americas. The movement he led and inspired shook the Mexican state in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and helped lay the foundations for the Mexican revolution of 1910. He was also a participant in radical movements in the United States and a security concern that reached the highest levels of the U.S. government.

The literature on Magón and the Magonists (as his comrades were known) has expanded considerably in recent decades and it is now possible to develop a fuller appreciation of the movement than at any previous time. One can explore the personal dilemmas of Magón and his co-conspirators through various scholarly biographies, read about the Magonists' impact on specific regions of the United States and Mexico, or study Magonist contributions to Mexican radicalism generally.<sup>1</sup>

Anarchists should welcome this not only because our predecessors are finally receiving the historical recognition that they deserve but also because we now have the resources necessary to undertake a deep confrontation with the Magonist legacy. It is now possible to develop a very clear idea of how the Magonists tried to create an anarchist revolution, the consequences their activity yielded, as well as determine whether there are aspects of their activity that we should emulate today.

The books reviewed here are particularly useful. *El magonismo: historia de una pasión libertaria, 1900-1922* (*Magonism: History of a Libertarian Passion, 1900-1922*) by Salvador Hernández Padilla studies the entire history of Magonism from its emergence at the turn of the century to its disappearance from the political scene in the 1920s. *El fenómeno magonista en México y en Estados Unidos 1905-1908* (*The Magonist Phenomenon in Mexico and the United States, 1905-1908*) by Ricardo Cuauhtémoc Esparza Valdivia examines Magonist activity in Mexico and the United States in the years indicated by the title.

Together these works offer a comprehensive picture of the Magonist experience. They reveal a deeply radical social movement that nearly toppled the regime of Porfirio Díaz, the dictator who governed Mexico from 1884 until the 1910 Mexican Revolution. But they also reveal a movement

*El Magonismo: historia de una pasión libertaria, 1900-1922*  
(*Magonism: History of a Libertarian Passion, 1900-1922*)

By Salvador Hernández Padilla  
México, D.F.: Ediciones Era, 1984

*El fenómeno magonista en México y en Estados Unidos 1905-1908*  
(*The Magonist Phenomenon in Mexico and the United States, 1905-1908*)

By Ricardo Cuauhtémoc Esparza Valdivia  
Zacatecas: Centro de Investigaciones Históricas,  
Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, 2000

that was beset by intractable problems in both conception and organization.

## The Magonist Challenge

The Magonist revolutionary challenge can be divided into three categories: the years prior to 1906 (when the movement was taking shape), the uprisings of 1906 and 1908 (the movement's highpoint), and the period from 1911 to Magón's death in 1922 (the years of decline).

In the years prior to 1906, which are treated by both Esparza Valdivia and Hernández Padilla, the Magonists were little more than a minor irritant for the Mexican government and did not yet possess a coherent revolutionary strategy. However, three transformations occurred that would later have great significance. First, Magón grew from a reformist radical into a revolutionary, thanks to his exposure to anarchist ideas (and the political persecution he suffered).<sup>2</sup> Second, Magón left Mexico for the United States and established himself in the country that would be the Magonist movement's base and his home for the remainder of his life. And, finally, the Magonists' central organizational vehicle, the Partido Liberal de México (Liberal Party of Mexico, PLM) was founded in September 5th, 1905 in St. Louis, Missouri.

## 1906 – 1908: Peak

It is from 1906 to 1908 that the Magonists acquired their fullest expression as a revolutionary movement. The Magonists, who were the most active opposition to the Díaz regime at the time, participated in strikes, launched militant uprisings, and tirelessly propagated their views. These years are the central concern of Hernández Padilla's *Magonismo* and essentially the sole focus of Esparza Valdivia's *Fenómeno Magonista*: the main difference between the two being that Hernández Padilla's broader perspective allows him to place this period in the context of Magonism's development as a whole whereas Esparza Valdivia compensates for his more limited purview with greater detail and more nuanced political commentary.

The Magonists were unambiguously revolutionary during these years, although the nature of their revolution was unclear and shaped by deeply contradictory aspirations. On the one hand, their goals were defined in the PLM's famous 1906 *Program*, which was essentially a social democratic document. The *Program*, which is reprinted in Hernández's

*Magonismo*, called for constitutional reforms, such as the reduction of the president's term to four years and the elimination of military tribunals during peace time, and made various demands relating to the relationship between capital and labor, such as the eight hour day and the minimum wage, etc. This was certainly *not* an anarchist program. As Esparza Valdivia states, "one of the most important aspects of this program lay in the creation of a state with a social consciousness, that would intervene to improve the conditions of the worker...so that workers and peasants can enjoy their constitutional rights."<sup>3</sup>

The Magonist movement's social democratic aims were further articulated in a letter sent to U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt by Magón and his comrade Antonio Villarreal. "At the triumph of the revolution," they wrote, "the Junta [of the Liberal Party] will provisionally take over the government, and call the people to elections. The people will elect new leaders, and the citizens favored by the public vote will of course take possession of their charges, while the Junta will dissolve itself. The new government will have the obligation to carry out the program of the Liberal Party, which is precisely the object of the revolution."<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, Magón's anarchism was maturing during this period and became an increasingly significant influence on PLM activity (although he did not publicly state his anarchist convictions until years later).<sup>8</sup> He explained the rationale behind such concealment in a 1908 letter to his brother Enrique and Práxedes Guerrero (both of whom were active Magonists). He wrote:

"In order to obtain great benefits for the people, effective benefits, to work as anarchists would easily crush us...all is reduced to a conception of mere tactics. If from the first we had called ourselves anarchists no one, or not but a few, would have listened to us. Without calling ourselves anarchists we have gone on planting in mind ideas of hatred against the possessing class and against the governmental caste...this has been achieved without saying that we are anarchists...all, then, is a question of tactics.

We must give land to the people in the course of the revolution; so that the poor will not be deceived...in order not to turn the entire nation against us, we must follow the same tactics that we have practiced with such success: we will continue calling ourselves liberals in the course of the revolution but in reality we will be propagating anarchy and executing anarchistic acts.

Only the anarchists will know that we are anarchists. And we will advise them not to call us anarchists in order not

to scare such imbeciles that in the depths of their consciousness harbor ideas like ours, but without knowing that they are anarchist ideals, therefore they are accustomed to hear talk about the anarchists in unfavorable terms."<sup>5</sup>

Esparza Valdivia explains this contradictory approach by stating simply that "the Magonists took their public discourse from liberalism and their strategy from anarchism."<sup>6</sup>

### Activity

In practice, the PLM tried to link itself to the incipient industrial workers' movement by radicalizing and supporting the miners' strike in Cananea and also the workers' rebellion among textile workers in Rio Blanco (at the beginning and end of 1906, respectively). PLM participation in both events lacked strongly articulated objectives and served primarily to make the Mexican government aware that they intended to become a genuine threat. This was the extent of Magonist engagement in the labor movement.

It was through the PLM's military activity that the organization mounted the most serious challenge and achieved its greatest notoriety. The Magonists initiated uprising after uprising in a (vain) attempt to spark a generalized insurgency against the Díaz regime.

The flurry of uprisings began in the later months of 1906, shortly after the release of the PLM's *Program*. The PLM had divided the Republic into five zones and structured its army hierarchically around the Junta of the PLM: in each zone a trusted Magonist served as a delegate to the Junta, which communicated orders through him to the leaders of regional guerilla groups who, in turn, commanded various sub leaders. As is typical of such cellular structures, only Magón and other members of the Junta knew the names of all combatants and the full scope of the organization's activities.

Poor planning, inadequate communication, and the combined efforts of Mexican and American security forces doomed many of these uprisings to failure. For example, on September 6th a rebellion was thwarted in Douglas, Arizona when the Magonists were arrested by the police in the United States. Another attempted uprising in Cananea was foiled on September 15th as well as one planned in San Luis Potosí. An attempt to take the city of Juárez on October 21st was also destroyed by arrests as was another potential uprising in La Perla de la Laguna.

Other PLM campaigns were more successful. For example, on September 26th a group of guerillas successfully seized

Jiménez, Coahuila, although they were scattered quickly due to a surprise attack by 80 Mexican soldiers. Numerous Magonists died in the conflict and others fled to the U.S. border, where they were apprehended by police from the United States. On September 30th three hundred Magonists attacked the town of Acayucan in the southern state of Veracruz. The group's leader, Hilario Salas, was injured and his forces dispersed. Two days later the Magonists repeated the attack and were dispersed once again. On October 4th, in the mountain range of Soteapan, approximately 350 largely indigenous Magonists from the region waged a fierce battle against federal troops, upon whom they inflicted great losses. They fled into the forest after the attack and were pursued by troops under the direct orders of Porfirio Díaz.

Thus, writes Esparza Valdivia, ended the "first wave of Magonist attempts to build an insurrection in the country," which unfolded "while the Mexican and American government acted more and more jointly to extinguish a conflict that involved both countries in its connections and consequences."<sup>7</sup>

In 1908, after a short period of reflection and reorganization, the Magonists launched a new insurrectionary wave from the cities of Los Angeles, El Paso, and Austin.

Although an attack planned for June 23rd in the city of Juárez was foiled by arrests and three more were thwarted in the state of Sonora, others were more successful. On June 24th an uprising occurred in Viesca, Coahuila. Twenty rebels killed the police commander and three of his staff, attacked the house of the municipal president, took money found in public offices as well as arms and other items from stores. After a battle, the guerrillas cut the telegraph line and tore up railroad tracks while fleeing and, two days later, killed a member of an advance team sent to search for them. The rebels were defeated only when confronted by a force of approximately 500 men. Four days later, on June 28th, fifty Magonists attacked the town of Las Vacas and a customs building on the border of Texas and Mexico. The offices of the Mexican officials and a troop barracks were both set on fire. The Magonists suffered losses during the ensuing battle. On June 30th Magonists threw two bombs at an empty customs office in Palomas and, before fleeing, lost one comrade in the ensuing combat.<sup>8</sup>

### Decline: 1911-1922

In 1911 the Magonists entered a decline that would continue until the movement was fully extinguished with Magón's death in 1922. Although this was a period of eclipse, the Magonists did carry out some important interventions in the final months of 1910 and the beginning of 1911.

At the end of 1910 a group of Magonists rebelled with Francisco Madero's forces, while remaining organizationally separate, in Bachiniva, Chihuahua. Madero, who assumed the Mexican presidency after the collapse of the Díaz regime, was the leader of the moderate, overtly reformist tendency within the Mexican revolutionary movement. This collaboration with Madero was soon followed by the crippling defection of numerous Magonists to Madero's camp.

However, "in the months of December 1910 and January of 1911, small nuclei of Magonists continued fighting in an independent form," notes Hernández Padilla.<sup>9</sup> For example, Práxedes Guerrero, one of the most active and talented Magonists, led an attack upon and captured the town of Janos, Chihuahua on December 30th. He died in this assault (at the age of 28) and became one of the movement's martyrs.

The Magonists biggest military campaign unfolded in the first half of 1911. On January 29th a handful of Magonists



Ricardo and Enrique Flores Magón in the Los Angeles County Jail, 1916.

seized Mexicali in the state of Baja, California and on May 8th and 9th seized Tijuana. Magonist forces also occupied San Quintín, Santo Tomás, San Elmo and Santa Catarina in the eastern part of the peninsula. The occupation of Baja, California descended into a comedy of errors and, in mid June, the Magonists were defeated by Mexican government troops (now under Madero's control). Numerous Magonist soldiers were apprehended and savagely executed at a "rate of six per day."<sup>10</sup>

In 1911 the PLM also released its *Manifiesto*, which contained an explicitly anarchist content and superseded the reformist 1906 *Program* as the organization's main statement of principal. Although this ended the ideological ambiguity that had haunted the movement for years, its release coincided with the decline of the Magonist presence in national affairs and thus produced no great effect. Indeed, while Magón "continued telling of the existence of groups of PLM guerillas that were acting in some regions of northern Mexico, concretely in the Sierra de Burro.... everything seems to indicate...that the guerilla groups had no real influence."<sup>11</sup>

Ricardo Flores Magón died in Leavenworth Penitentiary in 1922, at the age of forty nine, while serving a twenty year sentence for violating the Espionage Act and various postal regulations. Although some claim that he was assassinated, evidence seems to suggest that prison authorities murdered him indirectly by denying him needed medical care for his diabetes.

### Outcomes

The Magonists mounted a formidable challenge to the Mexican state and it is hard not to be impressed by the quantity and geographic spread of the uprisings that they launched, the material damage they inflicted upon the Mexican state, and the sheer numbers of people that they mobilized. This is especially remarkable when one considers that most of this unfolded over the course of five short years and was organized from various cities in the United States. However, Magón clearly failed to reach his genuine objective (social revolution), his stated objective (seizure of state power by the Liberal Party), or to build a radical movement that could survive beyond his death.

Why? In *El fenómeno magonista* Esparza Valdivia argues the Magonists were doomed by their inability to appeal to the truly disenfranchised classes. He notes that while the Magonists tried to agitate and lead the workers in the principal industries, Magonism only resonated with the middle classes who were, he asserts, "the principle support of the Magonist ideal."<sup>12</sup> Hernández Padilla makes a more specific claim in *Magonismo*. He points out that the Liberal

Party's social base was "comprised of small groups of workers, sectors of the urban middle class, and some landowners—principally from the northern states—[who were] discontented with the central government."<sup>13</sup> And, while the "program of the Liberal Party included the defense of peasant interests among its principal demands, in practice the Junta gave priority to the task of linking itself to, influencing, and organizing the industrial proletariat" and thus did not make significant gains among peasants (among whom the Zapatistas, for example, had great support).<sup>14</sup> He claims that the failure to make the peasantry an organizational focus became "one of the principle weaknesses of the PLM as an oppositional organization of the Left.... Without this support, it was less than impossible to successfully carry out a social revolution in Mexico."<sup>15</sup> Both authors also assert that the PLM was debilitated by unresolved ideological contradictions between the party's more moderate, reformist wing and the anarchist wing led by Magón.

Esparza Valdivia and Hernández Padilla's comments help explain why the Magonists did not build a more broad-based revolutionary movement. However, neither author asks what would have happened had the Magonists actually ignited the generalized uprising that they hoped to set off. Would they have seized power and called elections, as demanded by their *Program*, or would they have abolished the state as demanded by Magón's anarchist convictions? The failure to entertain this question suggests that the authors do not take the PLM's most ambitious objectives very seriously. And perhaps rightly so: everything seems to indicate that the PLM would have been immobilized by the irreconcilable contradictions in its aims had it genuinely confronted the question of power.

Despite the movement's failure to reach its most far reaching goals, it did produce several important secondary consequences. In *El fenómeno magonista*, Esparza Valdivia argues that the Magonists bear significant responsibility for prompting Porfirio Díaz to give an interview that is widely seen as a key factor in the eruption of the Mexican revolution. In this interview, which he conducted with American journalist James Creelman, Díaz stated that he supported the emergence of opposition parties and would not seek reelection. This encouraged the development of opposition forces that, in the end, he could not contain. Esparza Valdivia asserts that Díaz made these statements in an effort to assure American readers of his democratic credentials and needed to do so because his repressive campaigns against the Magonists had severely compromised his image in the United States. If this were the case, one could justly claim that the Magonists were responsible for the final collapse of the Díaz regime, but the argument is not compelling because it depends upon an assertion about Díaz's motives, which are impossible to ascertain.

The Magonists also constructed a radical legacy that has not only enriched anarchism but also Mexican national consciousness. Esparza Valdivia points out that the Magonists radicalized the discourse of the Mexican Revolution by showing "that it was not enough to conserve the Constitution of 1857 and the ideas of the Reform, [but] that it was necessary to take up the social question... This demand, the points that they stressed to resolve [this question] and the actions that they carried out in accordance with the anarchist project to make it a reality, were [their] most important contribution to national history."<sup>16</sup> This legacy, Esparza Valdivia continues, was embodied in the Mexican Constitution of 1917, which was considered the full realization of the aims of the Mexican Revolution and which took its most original features and orientation toward the social from the *Program* of the Mexican Liberal Party.<sup>17</sup>

### Magonismo Today?

I think it is easy to see why the Magonist movement would be attractive to historians, but what aspects of their activity would contemporary anarchists want to emulate?

Clearly the movement's courage, militancy, and insistence upon raising "the social question" are commendable and should be taken to heart by activists today. Although such an observation may seem platitudinal, the importance of such qualities for dissidents cannot be overstated.

However, beyond that, I think there is little in Magon's politics that one would want to replicate today. Magón's ideological duplicity—the fact that he concealed his anarchism beneath the Liberal banner—was a form of *realpolitik* that must be held in contempt by anyone who values the frank discussion of ideals and convictions. Likewise, the organizational structure of the Liberal Party was hierarchical and did not permit internal democracy. Indeed, organizationally, the PLM has more in common with a Marxist-Leninist vanguard party than the decentralized forms commonly associated with anarchism. Finally, the Magonists, like so many anarchists, held the naïve belief that social discontent merely needed to be sparked in order to erupt into a revolutionary explosion, and this short-cut to the creation of a genuinely informed and empowered revolutionary movement is deeply untenable. Social change is far more complex than that and such a perspective accords far too much importance to the acts of small groups and individuals.

Although anarchists should welcome the growing literature on Magonism and avail ourselves of the opportunity to study the movement deeply, no towering heroes emerge from the legacy that the Magonists have bequeathed to us. It is

imperative that we explore the contributions of our predecessors and also imperative that we remember that the foundations of a truly revolutionary politics for the Americas have yet to be fashioned.

### Endnotes

1. For example, see Ward S. Albro, *To Die on Your Feet: The Life, Times, and Writings of Praxedes G. Guerrero* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1996), Ward S. Albro, *Always a Rebel: Ricardo Flores Magon and the Mexican Revolution* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1992), and James A. Sandos, *Rebellion in the Borderlands: Anarchism and the Plan of San Diego, 1904–1923* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).
2. Esparza Valdivia asserts that Magón became an anarchist due to encounters with anarchists in St. Louis, although he does not substantiate this claim and it is not supported by other authors. It appears that Magón's anarchism developed from his exposure to anarchist literature that was circulating at the time. Ricardo Cuauhtémoc Esparza Valdivia, *El fenómeno magonista en México y en Estados Unidos 1905–1908* (Zacatecas: Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, 2000), 44.
3. *Ibid.*, 65.
4. Cited in Salvador Hernández Padilla, *El Magonismo: historia de una pasión libertaria, 1900–1922* (México, DF: Ediciones Era, 1984), 89.
5. The first two paragraphs are from Ward S. Albro, *Always a Rebel: Ricardo Flores Magón and the Mexican Revolution* (Fort Worth, Texas: Christian University Press, 1992). The final paragraph is from Jacinto Barrera Basols, *Correspondencia 2: 1919–1922* (México, DF: Fondo Editorial Tierra Adentro, 2000), 468.
6. Esparza Valdivia, *El fenómeno magonista en México y en Estados Unidos 1905–1908*, 182.
7. *Ibid.*, 75.
8. *Ibid.*, 158.
9. Hernández Padilla, *El magonismo: historia de una pasión libertaria, 1900–1922*, 137.
10. *Ibid.*, 163.
11. *Ibid.*, 195.
12. Esparza Valdivia, *El fenómeno magonista en México y en Estados Unidos 1905–1908*, 180.
13. Hernández Padilla, *El magonismo: historia de una pasión libertaria, 1900–1922*, 167.
14. *Ibid.*, 167.
15. *Ibid.*, 168.
16. Esparza Valdivia, *El fenómeno magonista en México y en Estados Unidos 1905–1908*, 184–185.
17. *Op cit.*



# Anarchist Approaches to Anti-Colonial Struggles: French Anarchists and the Algerian War

by *Andréa Schmidt*

I live in a colonial state, on the edge of an imperial power engaged in occupation and neo-colonial expansion of a late capitalist variety. In this context, the need for anarchists to engage with anti-colonial struggles at home and abroad should be self-evident. In many instances, though, solidarity with anti-colonial struggles seems to imply support for the mechanisms of domination that anarchists decry. It can mean supporting movements based on nationalism or religious identity or that demand a sovereign state. And while I tend to think that the question is not one of first order importance in the current political context, the question does at some point have to be considered if not answered definitively: what concepts or premises shape anarchists' solidarity with these movements?

French anti-authoritarians struggled with the question during the 1950s and 1960s, as the people of Indochina and Algeria fought to free themselves of French colonial rule, following the examples of Morocco and Tunisia in the preceding decades. Two recent books, *Les camarades des frères: trotskistes et libertaires dans la guerre d'Algérie* (*The Brothers' Comrades: Trotskyists and Anti-Authoritarians in the Algerian War*) by Sylvain Pattieu, and *Les anarchistes français face aux guerres coloniales (1945-1962)* (*French Anarchists Facing the Colonial Wars (1945 - 1962)*) by Sylvain Boulouque set out to describe French anti-authoritarians' relationship to the liberation movements and participation in the wars.

The Algerian War had a particularly significant impact on French anarchists and colonial French society in general. As Boulouque describes in the initial chapters of *Les camarades des frères*, Algeria wasn't simply administered and exploited by a French bureaucracy and army. Approximately 1,000,000 French colonials had settled in Algeria by the time guerrilla units of the Front de libération nationale (FLN) attacked French military posts and police stations in the early morning of November 1st, 1954. Moreover, the impoverishment of Arab and Muslim Algerians under colonial rule forced thousands to migrate to the metropolis where they were exploited in French factories, and interacted with French workers. Thus, the distance—geographic and moral—between the colonized and their

*Les anarchistes français face aux guerres coloniales (1945 - 1962)*

(*French Anarchists Facing the Colonial Wars (1945 - 1962)*)

By Sylvain Boulouque

Lyon: Atelier de création libertaire, 2003

*Les camarades des frères: Trotskistes et libertaires dans la guerre d'Algérie*

(*The Brothers' Comrades: Trotskyists and Anti-Authoritarians in the Algerian War*)

By Sylvain Pattieu

Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 2002

colonizers was substantially less than during Indochina's anti-colonial war. Indeed the war was ultimately fought not only in the Algerian *maquis* (brush-land), but in French settlers' quarters in Algeria and in French cafés in the metropolis.

During the decades that preceded the war, Messali Hadj founded both l'Etoile nord-africaine (North African Star, 1926) and the Parti populaire algérien (Algerian

People's Party, 1930), nationalist organizations of Algerian workers that set the stage for the independence struggle. In 1947, the PPA became the Mouvement pour le triomphe des libertés démocratiques (Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties, MTLD). Power-struggles developed and one faction within the organization remained faithful to Messali. Another faction formed the Comité révolutionnaire d'unité et d'action (Revolutionary Committee of Unity and Action, CRUA) in 1954 which in turn split several months later to form the FLN and its military organization, the Armée de libération nationale (National Liberation Army). In response, Messali founded the Mouvement national algérien (National Algerian Movement, MNA), an organization also oriented to armed struggle for the purpose of national liberation. The FLN and the MNA engaged in a deadly "café war" for control over the struggle for Algerian independence, in which bombings and shootings caused 5,000 casualties. By 1957, the FLN more or less predominated.

On March 12, 1956, the French government voted to give itself "special powers" to subdue the guerrilla war, which the army set about doing by means of torture and collective punishment as well as standard counterinsurgency measures. But the FLN persisted and the fighting went on, requiring that increasing numbers of French troops be sent to Algeria. Movements of draft-dodgers and conscientious objectors sprang up in France. The FLN escalated the cost of war by bringing the conflict out of the mountains and into urban centers with the Battle of Algiers in 1957, set off by the bombing of an Air France office and two other locations in the downtown center. French civilians' support for the war waned after 1958. In spite of colonial uprisings attacking the French administration in Algeria in 1960, the Gaullist regime signed a cease-fire treaty with the FLN in 1962, thereby

ending the war and granting Algeria independence. Estimates maintain that between 350,000 and one million people were killed during the eight years of the conflict.

Both *Les camarades des frères* and *Les anarchistes français* tell us more about the shifting political terrain of the far-left in France during the generation that fell between the Second World War and May 1968 than they describe the Algerian War or the national liberation movements per se. Pattieu, in *Les camarades des frères*, offers a detailed account of the ideological and organizational disputes that raged between various tendencies within the Parti Communiste Internationale (PCI), and that caused schism after schism within various anarchist organizations, publications and collectives.

The picture Pattieu paints of French anarchists during this period is relatively bleak, and consequently, relatively brief. The Fédération anarchiste (FA), was a synthesist group that was made up of pacifists, anarcho-communists, individualists and anarcho-syndicalists. While it condemned the repression of Algerian militants in the colony and at home in the metropolis, it was skeptical of the “progressive nature”<sup>1</sup> of the revolutionary forces in Algeria. In fact, it deemed the FLN to be a nationalist and bourgeois movement that, once having taken power, would go about exploiting its own proletarian class. The FA therefore published exhortations to the Algerian people to join “the only valuable struggle”: an anarchist struggle to free all men from all forms of exploitation and tyranny.<sup>2</sup> Pattieu observes that the FA’s wariness of the FLN was justified in many ways;<sup>3</sup> the FLN *was* a nationalist movement, and one based in a religious faith. Its leadership did ultimately want control of a state. However, the FA’s skepticism prevented it from engaging in any active form of support for the anti-colonial struggle, and with this attitude “condemn[ed] itself to passivity during the entire Algerian war.”<sup>4</sup> (This leaves little for Pattieu to write about the FA, and the organization drops out of sight for the last half of the book.)

The platformist Fédération communiste libertaire (FCL), in Pattieu’s assessment, was more pragmatic. It articulated an official position of “critical support” for the MNA. It also cultivated links to the small anarchist movement that existed in Algiers in 1954. And it avoided condemning the FLN. Members of the FCL, like the Trotskyists, invested real hope in what they perceived to be a workers’ revolution which they believed would spread beyond Algeria, and Pattieu suggests that in spite of their official “critical” stance, this enthusiasm prompted their more or less unconditional support for the revolution. This support seems to have mainly taken the form of propaganda: flyers, posters, and newspapers. Members of the FCL used their paper, *Le Libertaire*, to publish articles

and communiqués in support of the anti-colonial uprisings in Algeria from 1954 onward. Consequently, the state seized issues of *Le Libertaire* seven times between 1954 and 1956. The five editors of the paper were repeatedly prosecuted by the Ministry of the Interior. FCL activists were detained and interrogated on numerous occasions by French police in relation to the publication. Anarcho-communist Pierre Morain, for example, was prosecuted on charges related to the distribution of pro-revolutionary flyers and to the publication of two pro-MTLA articles in *Le Libertaire*. As a result, he spent a year and a half in jail. Ultimately, the criminalization and surveillance of the FCL activists contributed significantly to its dissolution in 1956, well before Algerian independence.

If his account of anarchist support for the anti-colonial struggle in Algeria is accurate, Pattieu is justified in devoting most of the book to describing Trotskyist activities instead. And these were substantial. Members of the PCI of the Frank tendency, 4th Internationalists, were officially “critical” but mostly staunch supporters of the FLN. Their familiarity with printing presses permitted them to broadcast their open support for the uprisings in their newspapers—for which a number of individuals were charged and jailed in repeated government attempts to silence them. But they were also willing and sufficiently trusted by FLN leadership to undertake more clandestine tasks such as printing and distributing outlawed FLN pamphlets, printing fake IDs for FLN militants, and even setting up an FLN munitions factory in Morocco. When they were charged and jailed for their involvement in the anti-colonial struggle, Trotskyists were able to mobilize significant and effective shows of solidarity by appealing to their international branches for support.

*Les anarchistes français face aux guerres coloniales* doesn’t paint a radically different picture of anarchists’ capacity to support the Algerian anti-colonial struggle, but it does elaborate and offer a more nuanced account of the positions they took. As such, it provides a more thoughtful foundation for specifically anarchist theoretical musings than does *Les camarades des frères* read on its own. As the title suggests, the book is entirely devoted to describing French anarchists’ attitudes toward the colonial wars and anti-colonial uprisings. Boulouque cites *Les anarchistes français* as valuable attempt to shed some light on anti-authoritarian support for the anti-colonial movement in Algeria. But he also suggests that Pattieu fails to draw the full diversity of positions held during this period of the anti-authoritarian movement’s history because he concentrates on the activities of the FCL, thereby giving the impression that there was no anti-authoritarian participation in the anti-colonial movement after its dissolution in 1956.<sup>5</sup>

Boulouque sets out to correct this impression. In the first section of the book, Boulouque attempts to lay out the plurality of French anti-authoritarian (anarchist and anarcho-communist) groups active through the colonial wars. He describes the anarchist movement as made up of about 400 people spread out across the country. Small groups of anarchists tended to regroup around the FA. Many were also involved in union activities with the Confédération Nationale du Travail (CNT) or the Confédération générale du travail-syndicaliste (CGT). He briefly traces the evolution of groups through a range of ideological and organizational debates, including the synthesist versus platformist debate that raged between the FA and FCL. These debates, Boulouque maintains, contributed to the diversity of positions taken vis-à-vis the anti-colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria.

In the second and third sections of the book, Boulouque examines a wide-range of anarchist and libertarian communist broadsheets and journals. He cites them at length in order to describe the range of reactions to France's colonial wars and to the anti-colonial movements and uprisings themselves. Boulouque ultimately arranges these anti-authoritarian reactions into three typologies, which constitutes the final and most theoretically interesting section of the book. First described is the position taken mainly by individualist anarchists, and some anarcho-syndicalists, who on the basis of their anti-statism, refused to get involved in supporting, even critically, the anti-colonial movements. Their anti-statism was reinforced in some instances by pacifism, which made them adverse to supporting armed struggle, and in others by a xenophobic version of syndicalism. The same principles that grounded their opposition to colonialism (primarily understood and rejected as a form of capitalist exploitation) and to the war make them unable to support a anti-colonial movement that in any way demonstrates a pre-state structure. "Their attitude," writes Boulouque, "above all a moral position, makes all action impossible."<sup>6</sup>

The second "ideal type" of reaction was one of unconditional support for the anti-colonial movements, which Boulouque ascribes to the FCL in their support for the MNA, and to some members of the Groupes Anarchistes d'Action Révolutionnaire (GAAR) in relation to the FLN (despite of the fact that the FCL's official stance was one of "critical support" for the anti-

colonial uprisings). The FCL's active rejection of colonialism rested on the view that it was the most severe manifestation of the logic of state rule. But more than that, the FCL's publications suggest that its members perceived in the anti-colonial uprisings a valuable point of intersection between anti-authoritarians and anti-colonial movements. This assessment assumed a three-step model of revolution in colonial countries (overthrow the army and the government; expropriate the means of production; instate a free, communist and anarchist social order) that FCL members convinced themselves had begun in Algeria. It also relied on an idealized perception of the anti-colonial movements in both Indochina and in Algeria and the organizations that played key roles in them. It is striking and somewhat disturbing, however, that it was proponents of this position who developed and maintained the most tangible links with those movements, and who actually engaged in solidarity work at considerable risk to their own safety.

The third position Boulouque presents is that of genuinely critical support. "Critical supporters," according to Boulouque, made up the majority of the anti-authoritarian movement, and he uses the term to describe the position taken by the Fédération anarchiste. They condemned colonialism, war, and militarism. They sympathized with the anti-colonial uprisings. But they remained wary of the religious and nationalist elements that helped fuel those uprisings, and repeatedly cautioned against them in their papers and pamphlets. On this basis, they could not maintain that the national liberation movements were revolutionary, even if they hoped that they might surpass their own goals and become truly liberatory movements capable of instantiating an anarchist social order. Thus, this position, though rhetorically supportive of the struggles of the

Algerian people (if not their leaders), took a "wait and see" approach to the always concrete and immediate work of solidarity, which essentially exempted them from dirtying their hands in the war at all.

Boulouque's effort to theorize the reasons for this "polyphony" of French anti-authoritarian responses to the anti-colonial movements in the post-war period is so brief it appears to be an afterthought to this already slender study. But it does serve to highlight a number of interesting theoretical questions raised in the course of the book: questions of the impact of



Office of *Le Libertaire* after being bombed in 1962.

generational differences on French anarchists; of theories of revolutions; of moral purity and principle versus engagement and solidarity; of the “theological” and “messianic” approach to social revolution that Boulouque perceives in a purist anarchist tradition.

The greatest limitation of *Les anarchistes français* is Boulouque’s methodology. The book, adapted from his Masters’ thesis, is essentially a literature review, and describes anarchists’ positions with regard to the anti-colonial struggles in Indochina and in Algeria based on a careful survey of various anarchist newspapers and periodicals published between 1945 and 1962. This is a useful strategy for uncovering the various anti-authoritarian rhetorical positions taken at that time. But it doesn’t give us much sense of what day-to-day support work for the MNA undertaken by members of the FCL was like, what compromises or reevaluations, both ideological and otherwise, it required or sparked. Nor does it allow Boulouque to broach the interesting subject of those anarchists he mentions in passing who, as individuals or in affinity groups, joined support networks for the FLN or the MNA, support networks that were sometimes included anti-authoritarians, but were often comprised of a much broader array of progressive Christians, intellectuals, and Trotskyists. People operating within these networks helped the FLN move funds and documents between the colony and the metropolis, assisted FLN militants in escaping from prison, and housed them. Because they did not have an “organization” with a paper, or because they chose roles other than that of pamphleteers, they are de facto excluded from the study. Boulouque, who bases his book on interviews with people active during that era as well as a literature and press survey, provides a more substantive and more satisfying description—at least in regard to the activities of the Trotskyist supporters of the FLN.

Both books are critical of the limitations of the anarchist positions with regard to the anti-colonial movements in Algeria. Pattieu goes so far as to say that anarchists tended to resort to slogans or apply old theoretical concepts to the new historical situation at hand, and consequently faltered when that method failed to produce an analysis that allowed them to engage the most pressing political questions of their time and place.<sup>7</sup> Yet neither author ventures further to ask what sort of theoretical concepts could have served as a more solid base for engagement. Restating classical anti-statist and pacifist positions was immobilizing. Appealing to a true anarchist-revolution-to-come acted as an excuse for disengagement. Idealizing anti-colonial struggles as the sparks of a global proletarian revolution was clearly inadequate for assessing the potential and the limitations of an organization like the FLN. To what concepts could French anti-authoritarians have appealed in their struggle to respond

adequately to colonialism as a specific mode of domination and to ground tangible solidarity with anti-colonial struggles?

One answer to this question *might* lie in the notion of self-determination, a concept that has (re-) appeared to play a central role in much anarchist discourse of late. Appeals to the right to self-determination of individuals and communities seem suddenly to justify much contemporary North American anti-authoritarian and anti-colonial solidarity work. Complemented by a well-developed analysis of the ravages and rewards of colonialism and neo-colonialism, appeals to the right or the capacity for self-determination of both communities and the individuals who live in them seems to allow anarchists to ground a “critical support” for anti-colonial movements that may be based on nationalist or religious claims, that may be demanding statehood, that may even be led and manipulated by a strata of more or less power hungry elites.

The notion of self-determination is a useful one because it can be deployed to critique hierarchies and systems of domination operating on a number of levels simultaneously. It can be used to assert the right of a national liberation movement to rise up against military occupation and economic coercion. At the same time, it can take on despotic movement leadership or proto-state structures to assert the rights of the most exploited or ignored people within the community. The concept also functions a persistent reminder that it is not up to those of us extending our solidarity from the vantage point of colonial or neo-colonial centers of power to determine the best strategies and tactics for people fighting daily to resist the colonial and neo-colonial usurpation of their land, their cultures, and their freedom. As such, the concept of self-determination doesn’t allow us the comfort of watching passively from the sidelines if we opine that their strategy does not have an anti-authoritarian society as its logical conclusion or plausible end. What it might do instead, though, is privilege the possibility that there are many (bloody, winding) trajectories toward a multiplicity of free societies.

#### Endnotes:

1. Sylvain Pattieu, *Les camarades des frères: Trotskistes et libertaires dans la guerre d’Algérie* (Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 2002), 58.
2. Ibid., 58–59.
3. Ibid., 59.
4. Ibid., 59.
5. Sylvain Boulouque, *Les anarchistes français face aux guerres coloniales* (Lyons: Atelier de création libertaire, 2003), 8.
6. Ibid., 92.
7. Ibid., 110.



## About Contributors

**Randall Amster** is an instructor of Peace Studies and Social Thought at Prescott College in northern Arizona. His research interests and activist endeavors focus upon anarchism, ecology, utopia, resistance, homelessness, public space, globalization, peace movements, radical pedagogy, and community building.

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# Publications Received

## Books

Alexander Berkman, *What is Anarchism?* (Oakland: AK Press, 2003, 237 pages)

Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair (editors), *The Politics of Anti-Semitism* (Oakland: AK Press, 2003, 192 pages)

Curious George Brigade, *Anarchy in the Age of Dinosaurs* (Curious George Brigade, 2003, 151 pages)

The Dawn Collective, *Under the Yoke of the State: Selected Anarchist Responses to Prisons and Crime, 1886-1929* (London: Kate Sharpley Library, 2003, 60 pages)

Clark Hanjian, *The Sovrien: An Exploration of the Right to Be Stateless* (Vineyard Haven, MA: Polyspire, 2003, 283 pages)

George Katsiaficas, Daniel Burton Rose, Eddie Yuen (Editors), *Confronting Capitalism: Dispatches from a Global Movement* (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2003)

Notes From Nowhere (Editor), *We Are Everywhere: The Irresistible Rise of Global Anti-Capitalism* (London/New York, Verso, 2003, 320 pages)

Anton Pannekoek, *Workers' Council* (Oakland: AK Press, 2003, 219 pages)

John Patten, *Islands of Anarchy: Simian, Cienfuegos and Refract 1969-1987, An annotated bibliography* (London: Kate Sharpley Library, 2003, 77 pages)

Pablo Perez (coordinator) *Catalogo de Publicaciones Politicas, Sociales y Culturales Anarquistas (1890-1945)* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Reconstruir: Federación Libertaria Argentina, 2002, 190 pages)

Roy San Filipo (Editor) *A New World in Our Hearts: Eight Years of Writings from the Love and Rage Revolutionary Anarchist Federation* (Oakland: AK Press, 2003, 112 pages)

## CDs

Noam Chomsky, *The Emerging Framework of World Power* (Oakland: AK Press/Alternative Tentacles, 2003, 77 minutes)

Ward Churchill, *Life in Occupied America*, (Oakland: AK Press, 2003, 60 minutes)

Ward Churchill, *Pacifism and Pathology in the American Left* (Oakland: AK Press/ Alternative Tentacles, 2003, 78 minutes)

David Rovics, *Behind The Barricades: The Best Of David Rovics* (Oakland: AK Press/Daemon Records, 2003, 70 minutes)

The Freedom Archives, *Chile: Promise of Freedom* (Oakland: AK Press/Alternative Tentacles, 2003)

Utah Phillips, *I've Got to Know* (Oakland: AK Press/Daemon Records, 2003, 70 minutes)

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